Action Stories of Every Variety

ARGOSY

ON SALE EVERY WEDNESDAY

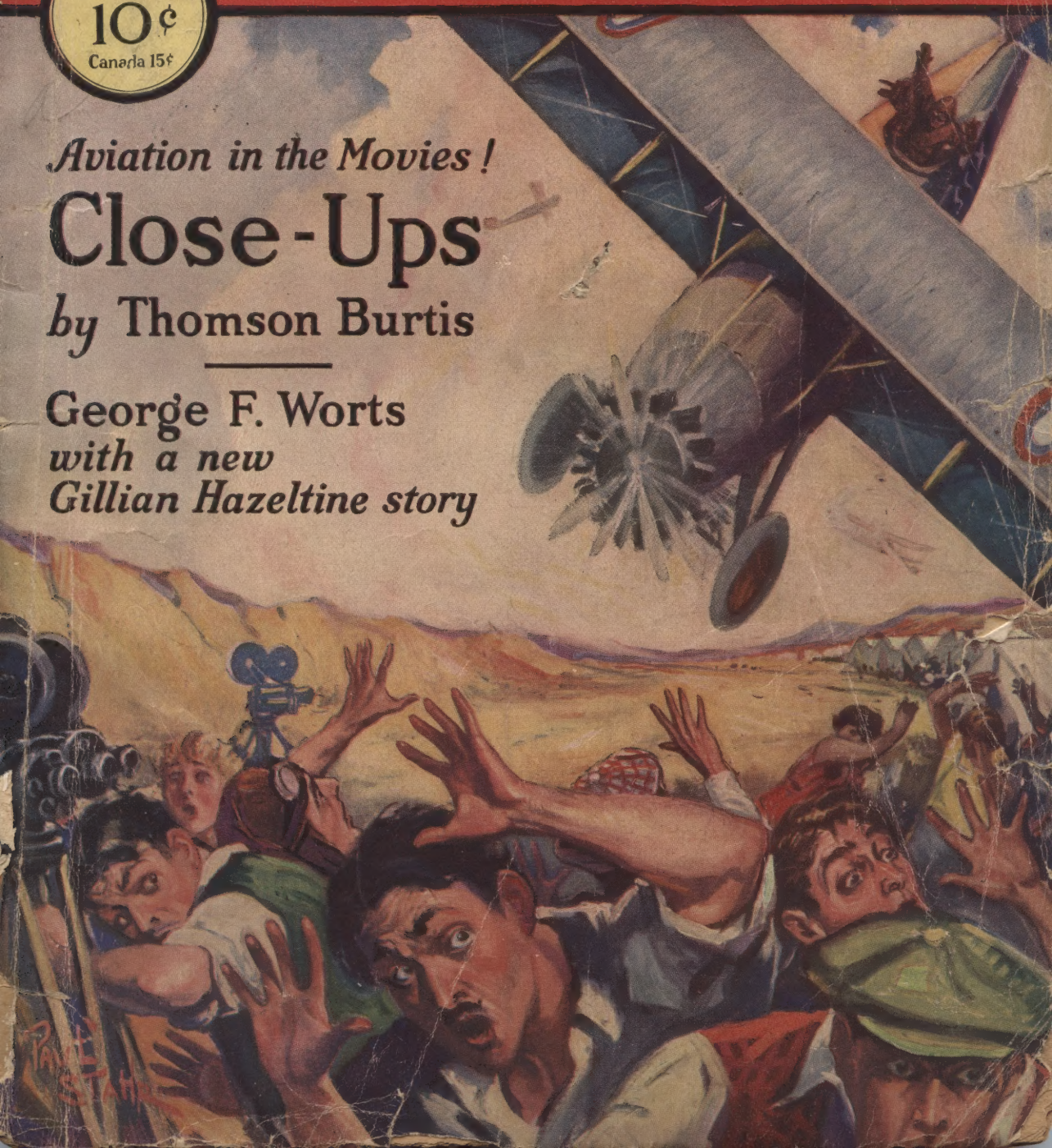
JULY 12
10¢
Canada 15¢

Aviation in the Movies!

Close-Ups

by Thomson Burtis

George F. Worts
with a new
Gillian Hazeltine story



Not one out of ten escapes this social fault

Can you be sure that you never have halitosis (unpleasant breath)? Are you certain at this very moment, that you are free of it?

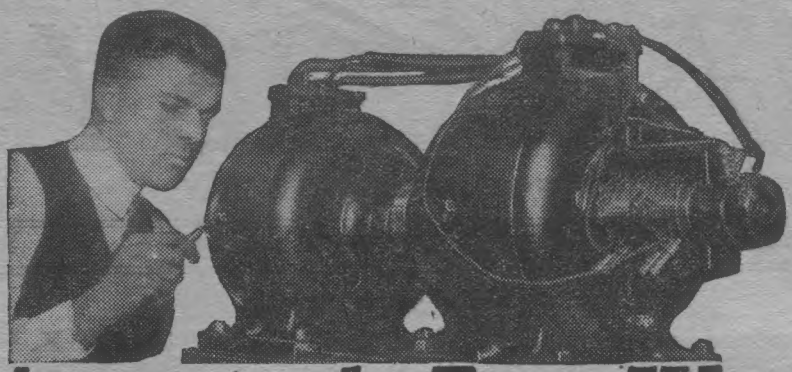
The insidious thing about this unforgivable social fault is that you, yourself, never know when you have it; the victim simply cannot detect it.

Remember, also, that anyone is likely to be troubled, since conditions capable of causing halitosis arise frequently in even normal mouths.

Fermenting food particles, defective or decaying teeth, pyorrhea, catarrh, and slight infections in the mouth, nose, and throat—all produce odors. You can get rid of these odors instantly by gargling and rinsing the mouth with full strength Listerine. Every morning. Every night. And between times before meeting others. Listerine halts fermentation because it is an antiseptic. It checks infection because it is a remarkable germicide.* And it quickly overcomes odors because it is a rapid and powerful deodorant. Lambert Pharmacal Company, St. Louis, Mo., U. S. A.

LISTERINE *ends* halitosis

*Though safe to use in any body cavity, full strength Listerine kills even the Staphylococcus Aureus (pus) and Bacillus Typhosus (typhoid) germs in counts ranging to 200,000,000 in 15 seconds (fastest time accurately recorded by science).



Amazingly Easy Way to get into ELECTRICITY

Don't spend your life waiting for $5 raises, in a dull, hopeless job. Now . . . and forever . . . say good-bye to 25 and 35 dollars a week. Let me show you how to qualify for jobs leading to salaries of $50, $60 and up, a week, in Electricity—NOT by correspondence, but by an amazing way to teach, RIGHT HERE IN THE GREAT COYNE SHOPS. You become a practical expert in 90 days! Getting into Electricity is far easier than you imagine!

Learn Without Lessons in 90 DAYS

By Actual Work—in the Great Shops of Coyne

Lack of experience—age, or advanced education bars no one. I don't care if you don't know an armature from an air brake—I don't expect you to! I don't care if you're 16 years old or 48—it makes no difference! Don't let lack of money stop you. Most of the men at Coyne have no more money than you have.

Railroad Fare Allowed

I will allow your railroad fare to Chicago, and if you should need part-time work I'll assist you to it. Then, in 12 brief weeks in the great roaring shops of Coyne, I train you as you never dreamed you could be trained . . . on a gigantic outlay of electrical apparatus . . . costing hundreds of thousands of dollars . . . real dynamos, engines, power plants, autos, switchboards, transmitting stations . . . everything from doorbells to farm power and lighting . . . full-sized . . . in full operation every day!

Prepare for Jobs Like These

Here are a few of hundreds of positions open to Coyne-trained men. Our free employment bureau gives you lifetime employment service.

Armature Expert	up to $100 a Week
Substation Operator	$60 a Week and up
Auto Electrician	$110 a Week
Inventor	Unlimited
Maintenance Engineer	up to $150 a Week
Service Station Owner	up to $200 a Week
Radio Expert	up to $100 a Week

etc., etc. That's a glimpse of how we make you a master practical electrician in 90 days, teaching you far more than the average ordinary electrician ever knows and fitting you to step into jobs leading to big pay immediately after graduation. Here, in this world-famous *Parent school*—and nowhere else in the world—can you get this training!

Jobs, Pay, Future

Don't worry about a job, Coyne training settles the job question for life. Demand for Coyne men often exceeds the supply. Our employment bureau gives you a lifetime service. Two weeks after graduation Clyde F. Hart got a position as electrician for the Great Western Railroad at over $100 a week. That's not unusual. We can point to Coyne men making up to $600 a month. $60 a week is only the beginning of your opportunity. You can go into radio, battery, or automotive electrical business for yourself and make up to $15,000 a year.

Get the Facts

Coyne is your one great chance to get in to electricity. Every obstacle is removed. This school is 30 years old—Coyne training is tested—proven beyond all doubt—endorsed by many large electrical concerns. You can find out everything absolutely free. Simply mail the coupon and let me send you the big, free Coyne book of 150 photographs . . . facts . . . jobs . . . salaries . . . opportunities. Tells you how many earn expenses while training and how we assist our graduates in the field. This does not obligate you. So act at once. Just mail coupon.

Get This *Free* Book

NO BOOKS
No Printed Lessons

No books, no baffling charts . . . all real actual work . . . right here in the great Coyne school . . . building real batteries . . . winding real armatures, operating real motors, dynamos and generators, wiring houses

NOW IN OUR NEW HOME

This is our new fireproof, modern home wherein is installed thousands of dollars' worth of the newest and most modern Electrical equipment of all kinds. Every comfort and convenience has been arranged to make you happy and contented during your training.

COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL
H. C. LEWIS, President
500 S. Paulina Street, Dept. BO-57, Chicago, Ill.

Mr. H. C. LEWIS, President
Coyne Electrical School, Dept. BO-57
500 S. Paulina Street, Chicago, Illinois

Dear Mr. Lewis:

Without obligation send me your big free catalog and all details of Railroad Fare to Chicago. Free Employment Service, Radio, Aviation Electricity, and Automotive Courses, and how I can "earn while learning."

Name.....

Address.....

City.....*State*.....

ARGOSY

ON SALE EVERY WEDNESDAY

VOLUME 213 | CONTENTS FOR JULY 12, 1930 | NUMBER 5

SERIALS

Murder! Murder! (Four Parts. Part I) . . . . . George F. Worts 580
Gillian Hazeltine's proxy takes the field

Moving Day (Six Parts. Part II) . . . . . Edgar Franklin 637
A truckload of trouble

The Trail of Deceit (Six Parts. Part V) . . . . . W. C. Tuttle 670
A tangled mystery of the modern cow country

The Radio Menace (Six Parts. Part VI) . . . . Ralph Milne Farley 696
Robot super-scientists invade America

COMPLETE STORIES

The Ruby of Suratan Singh (Short Story) . . . . Theodore Roscoe 597
At the end of an Indian jungle trail

Close-Ups (Novelette) . . . . . Thomson Burtis 612
Daredevils of the air-movie game

Death's Outpost (Short Story) . . . . . George Tibbitts 660
Wits vs. murder at a lonely trading station

The Clutch of Circumstance (Short Story) . . John H. Thompson 692
Bill and Jim play good Samaritans

OTHER FEATURES

COVER DESIGN . . . . . Paul Stahr
A Sailor's Garden . . . . . Minna Irving 596
When the Chinese Advertise . . . . . Raymond A. Wohlrabe 611
Origin of Chop Suey . . . . . Oscar B. Aldrich 669
The Burning Bush of Corsica . . . . . John H. Spicer 691
The Men Who Make The Argosy—JOHN H. THOMPSON 716
Argonotes 717
Looking Ahead! 720

This magazine is on sale every Wednesday throughout the United States and Canada

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, Publisher, 280 Broadway, New York

MESSAGERIES HACHETTE
8, La Belle Sauvage, Ludgate Hill, London, E.C.4

PARIS: HACHETTE & CIE.,
111 Rue Reaumur

WILLIAM T DEWART, President C. T. DIXON, Vice President

Published weekly and copyright, 1930, by The Frank A. Munsey Company. Single copies, 10 cents; by the year, $4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; $7.00 to Canada and Foreign Countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered. Entered as second-class matter November 28, 1896, at the post-office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879. The entire contents of this magazine are protected by copyright, and must not be reprinted without the publishers' permission. Title registered in U. S. Patent Office. Copyrighted in Great Britain.

Manuscripts submitted to this Magazine should be accompanied by sufficient postage for their return if found unavailable. The publisher can accept no responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts.

Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needfuls for the HOME, OFFICE, FARM, or PERSON; to offer, or seek, an unusual BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

August 23rd Classified Forms Close July 19th

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

UNUSUAL OPPORTUNITY — $100 WEEKLY SELLING BETTER QUALITY, ALL-WOOL, union-made-to-measure suits and topcoats at $23.50 and $31.50. Build big repeat business. Liberal bonus for producers. Large swatch samples FREE. W. Z. GIBSON, INC., 500 Throop, Dept. U-409, Chicago.

$14 A DAY PAID FOR TAKING ONLY TWO ORDERS DAILY, FOR OUR FINE ALL-WOOL UNION-MADE-TO-ORDER SUITS. WE TRAIN THE INEXPERIENCED. FREE FORD CAR TO HUSTLERS. Handsome carrying case outfit of large real cloth samples furnished free. SPENCER MEAD COMPANY, Harrison and Throop Sts., Dept. U-709, Chicago.

MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

MONEY MADE IN MICHIGAN POTATOES. $10 DOWN NOW AND EASY TERMS BUYS LAND NEAR MARKETS, LAKES, STREAMS. WRITE TODAY. SWIGART & CO., M-601, 32 NO. STATE ST. BLDG., CHICAGO.

TOBACCO

SWEAR OFF TOBACCO. NO MATTER HOW LONG YOU HAVE BEEN A VICTIM, NO MATTER HOW STRONG YOUR CRAVING, NO MATTER IN WHAT FORM YOU USE TOBACCO, THERE IS HELP FOR YOU. Just send postcard or letter for our Free Book. It explains everything. NEWELL PHARMACAL CO., Dept. 845, Clayton Station, St. Louis, Mo.

QUIT TOBACCO—JOIN THE THOUSANDS OF TOBACCO USERS THAT HAVE FOUND IT EASY TO QUIT WITH THE AID OF THE KEELEY TREATMENT. WRITE TODAY FOR FREE BOOK AND OUR MONEY BACK GUARANTEE. THE KEELEY INSTITUTE, Dept. L-804, Dwight, Illinois.

PATENT ATTORNEYS

PATENTS—Write for free guide book, "How To Obtain A Patent" and Record of Invention Blank. Send model or sketch and description of inventions for Free Opinion whether it comes within Patent Office Rules. Easy Payments. VICTOR J. EVANS & CO., 762 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

Patents. Booklet Free. Highest references, best results. Promptness assured. Send drawing or model. WATSON E. COLEMAN, Registered Patent Lawyer, 724 Ninth St., Washington, D. C.

INVENTORS—WRITE FOR OUR GUIDE BOOK, "How to Get Your Patent," and evidence of invention blank. Send model or sketch for Inspection and Instructions Free. Terms reasonable. RANDOLPH & CO., Dept. 412, Washington, D. C.

A FREE BOOK EXPLAINS HOW

MASTER YOUR LIFE!

Use the Powers of the Inner Self and Infinite mind. Practical Rosicrucian methods help to overcome Life's obstacles and put you in tune with Cosmic Vibrations for Health and Happiness. Learn the Great Truths. Write for Free Book to—

LIBRARIAN J. K. K.
ROSICRUCIAN BROTHERHOOD
SAN JOSE (AMORC) CALIF.

Stories for Magazines

Our Sales Service Department has sold many new authors' first stories. Many markets using all types of stories now open. Screen rights on fiction stories reserved to author and personally submitted by us direct to Studios. Stories accepted any form for reading, criticism, revision and submission to markets. Send for free booklet giving full particulars.

UNIVERSAL SCENARIO COMPANY
409 Western & Santa Monica Bldg. Hollywood, Calif.

RUPTURE IS NOT A TEAR

NO BREAK TO HEAL

Rupture is not a tear, but purely a muscular weakness in the abdominal wall. Trusses merely brace these muscles but do not strengthen them—on the contrary, the gouging of the ordinary truss pad often increases this weakness as it tends to shut off circulation of the blood.

STUART'S ADHESIF PLAPAO-PADS are entirely different—being mechanico-chemico applicators—made self-adhesive purposely to keep the muscle-tonic called "Plapao" continuously applied to the affected parts, and to minimize danger of slipping and painful friction. The adhesive fabric is soft as velvet and clings to the body without straps, buckles or springs. Easy to apply—comfortable—inexpensive. Awarded Gold Medal, Rome, Grand Prix, Paris, Honorable Mention, Panama Pacific Exposition, San Francisco, etc. For almost a quarter century stacks of sworn testimonials from many different countries report success—without delay from work. The epidermatic absorption of Plapao utilizing "mechanico-chemico therapy" tends toward a natural process of recovery, *after which no further use for a truss.*

Stop wasting your time and money on old-fashioned devices. Learn how to close the hernial opening as nature intended, so the rupture can't come down. Send no money; just mail the Free Test coupon below. For your own good—write today—tomorrow may be too late.

FREE TEST COUPON

Plapao Laboratories, Inc., 449 Stuart Bldg., St. Louis, Mo.

Send me a Free 10 day test supply of the remedial factor Plapao and 48-page illustrated book on Rupture; no charge for this now or later.

Name.....

Address.....

Amazing New Kind Of ORANGE JUICER

Pays Real Money to **AGENTS**

WITHOUT DOUBT, here's the hottest item introduced in direct selling for the past 10 years—KWIKWAY—an amazing little hand operated orange juicing machine that 9 out of every 10 housewives grab for the minute they see it. Fully patented. Remarkably efficient. Ten oranges with KWIKWAY equals a dozen with ordinary juicers. Saving actually pays for juicer in short time. Sells like wildfire in homes, hotels, restaurants, hospitals, fountains. E. F. Johns sold 12 in 5 minutes in one hospital. Many other records as good or better. Selling Outfit without cost and protected territory to producers. Make income satisfactory to you or trial costs nothing. Write at once for full details of generous NO-RISK offer to agents.

KWIKWAY PRODUCTS, INC.
1415 Pine St. Dept. K-460 St. Louis, Missouri

SELL ROSECLIFF SHIRTS

Make Steady Money

Showing Samples Men's Shirts Ties, Underwear brings you big cash commissions. One Year Guarantee. No substitutions. Free silk initials. More exclusive Rosecliff features establish leadership. Write for your FREE Outfit NOW!

YOUR OWN SHIRTS and TIES

ROSECLIFF SHIRT CORP.
Dept. L-7
1237 Broadway, N. Y.

Outfit Free

ARGOSY

ON SALE EVERY WEDNESDAY

VOLUME 213 SATURDAY, JULY 12, 1930 NUMBER 5

Murder! Murder!

While the shadow of the electric chair looms over Soupy Joe Gorlish, the young assistants of Gillian Hazeltine and District Attorney Yistle prepare for a bitter personal battle to determine his fate

By GEORGE F. WORTS

Author of "The Diamond Trail," "The Lost Punch," etc.

CHAPTER I.

"ANGEL FACE."

AT nine o'clock on the evening of June 4th "Sapphire Rosie" Viaretto, a luscious Italian beauty of shady renown, was murdered in the back room of a speakeasy on River Street by a person or persons unknown. Two slugs of copper-jacketed lead in the brain accounted for the lady's startling and speedy exit from this life.

The flame of Rosie's soul vanished no more swiftly than did the sapphires for which she was notorious.

Promptly, one "Soupy Joe" Gorlish was arrested and charged with the crime. After an all-night "private conference" with Detective Sergeant Walsh, of the homicide squad, and several of the sergeant's large and muscular assistants, Soupy Joe was willing to confess any crime which any of them might have mentioned.

As Sergeant Walsh expressed it, "Another hour of sweating and Soupy would have swore he was the guy who shot Lincoln."

Limp with exhaustion, Soupy Joe was tossed into a cell to await the gearing-up of the majestic legal machine which would, in due course, return him to his freedom, without apologies, or seat him in a fantastic chair and shoot volts through him until nothing whatever mattered.

On the following morning Gillian Hazeltine, the famous criminal lawyer, sometimes referred to by his enemies as "The Silver Fox"—not wholly because his curly black hair was prematurely sprinkled with silver—sat in his private office in the Anderson Building, smoking a dollar cigar and reading with relish an account of the murder in a tabloid newspaper.

The front page was given over entirely to a touched-up likeness of Sapphire Rosie and her bold, black eyes and her full, sensuously smiling lips. Under it was this black-faced caption:

Queen of Sapphires, Who Meets Doom at Hands of Jilted Lover (*Story on p. 3*)

Turning obediently to page 3, Gillian encountered this poetic headline:

DEATH O'ERTAKES GHETTO'S ROSE

"Sapphire Girl" Fatally Shot by Paroled Convict—Fortune in Gems Missing

Gillian, the Silver Fox, read to the end of the sensational matter and glanced at the page of blurry flash light photographs, showing Soupy Joe, sagging and white-faced, between two smiling policemen, each of whom made two of Soupy; showing the back room of the speakeasy in which the deed was committed (Maltese cross marks the spot where Sapphire Rosie was seated drinking a gin flip when the assassin's gun roared); showing the "death wagon" with the mortal remains of "Greenboro's Underworld Queen" being loaded in by grinning morgue attendants, and showing, for a realistic touch, the unpopular piece of furniture into which Soupy would probably be strapped for his last frantic few moments on earth.

PUFFING comfortably at his good cigar, Gillian reflected: "So they've rigged poor old Soupy at last! I wonder who really murdered that rotten little gold-digger? This case smells to high heaven; I would not touch it—no, not even with a ten-foot pole."

At this moment fate, in the form of Gillian's neat and efficient secretary, Miss Ruth Barrow, entered with strange lights dancing in her eyes, ruby color flaming in her cheeks, an excited smile at her pretty lips, and an unsealed envelope in her hand. She placed the letter on the desk before Mr. Hazeltine and said in a tremulous voice:

"He—he's waiting."

Gillian cocked his excellent cigar at her, wondering what had happened to make the cool and self-possessed girl so excited, and inquired:

"Who's waiting?"

She gasped: "Mr. Montmorency Wilberton Brampingham!"

"I beg your pardon?" said the lawyer, frowning.

Miss Barrow repeated the astonish-

ing words: "Mr. Montmorency Wilberton Brampingham."

Gillian looked at her suspiciously.

"There is no such person," he stated firmly. "You girls are up to another of your practical jokes on me. It isn't fair."

"He's in the waiting room—waiting, Mr. Hazeltine."

"Montmorency Wilberton Brampingham," remarked Gillian, "is not the name of a real man, but the invention of some fertile but slightly decadent mind. It's fiction."

"He's out there," the girl insisted. "I saw him with my own eyes."

"Hence the blush?"

"Montmorency Wilberton Brampingham," said Miss Barrow, "is so good-looking that every girl in the outer office is demoralized and in a perfect flutter."

"What does he look like?"

"His radiance is so blinding that I would have to wear smoked glasses to see him well enough to describe him to you. He is very polite. He would like a moment of your time if you aren't too busy, but he isn't insistent. He can come back any time you say. He has all the earmarks of a human shrinking violet."

Gillian looked at Miss Barrow distrustfully. She had a dry sense of humor, but she generally kept it under control during office hours.

"Wait," he instructed her, and opened the letter. Not engraved, just cheaply printed, the letterhead said:

William Brampingham, M.D.
Cherryville, Iowa

The letter was dated June 6, 1929—almost a year ago. A faint light of recollection dawned in Gillian's eyes. The letter was typed on what must have been a patriarch among typewriters, and was full of typographical errors. Gillian began to read:

> MY DEAR GILL:
>
> You have no doubt forgotten all about me since the old days when we used to kick the ball around. I haven't attended a single class reunion since they sent me out to conquer the world.

The light in Gillian's eyes brightened. Bill Brampingham! Good old Bill! A memory of frosty fall days came into Gillian's mind. Bands playing rousing collegiate tunes. Crowds rah-rahing. Men in padded brown suits with numbers on their backs surging up and down a muddy field. Bill Brampingham kicking a goal—a marvelous picture of grace, power and coördination. Bill had been one of the smartest, fastest, toughest quarterbacks the State University had ever had.

> I have followed your career, your rise to fame and fortune with a brotherly and gladsome eye. You have done credit to good old State. As for myself, I have sunk deeper and deeper into the rut of general practitioner in this little tank town away out in the corn belt.

Gillian sadly shook his head. It hurt him to hear that Bill Brampingham, that flaming, fighting youth, had become and remained a country doctor, when he had been so certain that Bill was destined to become one of the country's great surgeons.

> I have done only one worth-while thing in my life—begotten a son that any father would be proud of. You know what a homely brat I was. My son, Montmorency, the bearer of this note, is not, thank God, a chip of the old block. He was voted the best-looking man in his class!

Gillian paused in his perusal of the letter and puffed slowly at his dollar

cigar. How could any hard-boiled man boast of having a son whose claim to distinction was his good looks?

> Knowing how much appearances count in a jury lawyer, I am convinced that Montmorency has a great career ahead of him in the court room.
>
> Look Montmorency over. Size him up. Don't take my word for him. Give him a chance if you can. If you take hold of him and make another Gillian Hazeltine out of him, I will feel that my life has not been lived in vain.
>
> With affectionate regards,
>
> BILL.

Gillian put the letter down, his eyes still bright with old memories. Clearing his throat, he said to Miss Barrow: "Send Adonis in."

He settled back in his chair and prepared himself for the entrance of Montmorency Wilberton Brampingham. He knew what to expect: a beautiful youth full of conceit and probably effeminate.

BUT when Montmorency Wilberton Brampingham walked into the room, Gillian was shocked. All the advance notices on the male pulchritude of old Bill Brampingham's offspring fell so short of the reality!

To say that Montmorency Wilberton Brampingham was tall, blond, blue-eyed and handsome only hinted at the facts. He was a Greek god. He was radiant. His hair was a curly, rippling golden glory. His eyes were large and as blue as sapphires. His nose had the clean-cut perfection of a cameo.

His size dwarfed everything in the room. He stood about six feet two; his shoulders were those of a gladiator; his attire was flawless. Gillian knew that his double-breasted blue serge suit, somewhat shiny though it was, had been fitted by a tailor glorying in his chance to express his artistic soul. His large brown oxfords, somewhat the worse for wear, were brightly shined. His nails were well manicured.

His expression was sober, but when Gillian held out his hand, Montmorency Wilberton Brampingham smiled, and when he smiled he was twice as good-looking as he was when he wasn't smiling.

"Sit down," said Gillian cordially; and, when the handsome young man was seated: "Your father tells me you have aspirations to become a great trial lawyer."

"Yes, sir!"

"Well, tell me something about yourself. What makes you think you're cut out to be a trial lawyer? What experience have you had? What proposition, specifically, are you putting up to me?"

The handsome young man replied, in a modest tone: "I would like to become your assistant. I've been out in Cloverdale, Ohio, working on all sorts of cases in Judge Lorgan's office. Maybe you've heard about the judge, Mr. Hazeltine. He's a great character—and a real idealist. You know him, of course?"

Gillian shook his head. "Never heard the name before." He was more interested in the handsome young man's voice than in what he was saying. It was a rich, deep, melodious bass voice—a beautiful voice. "What did Judge Lorgan let you do?"

"Everything! I've argued every kind of case, from titles to murders."

"And you feel you're in a position to jump into the kind of work I do?"

"Well, I know I'm still pretty green, but I'd appreciate a chance, and I assure you I'm a hard worker."

Listening to that deep, rich voice, scrutinizing the young man as he

talked, Gillian was trying to arrive at some estimate of his character. One point was certain: Montmorency Wilberton Brampingham was not in the least degree effeminate. Aside from the fact that he was too good-looking, he seemed to Gillian to be a likable, decent fellow. But Gillian had the prejudice of most men against Adonises. He said:

"Tell me more about yourself. What did you do in college?"

The visitor smiled again. "Studied—mostly."

"How about athletics?"

"I didn't go in much for athletics."

"Your father was a great football player. Didn't you go out for the team?"

It seemed to Gillian that the question sent a wave of pink into Montmorency's clear, fair skin.

"No, sir; my father positively refused to let me go out for the team."

"How about boxing?"

"He wouldn't let me go out for that, either." The applicant hesitated.

"Why not?" Gillian barked.

THE young man averted his eyes. "Well, it— You see, my father was afraid I'd get my face banged up. He—he didn't want me to have any scars, or anything of that sort. So I gave in."

"You mean, you wanted to play football?"

"Yes. But more especially, I wanted to box. My father had a pretty tough time of it, sending me through college, and it was up to me to obey him."

"I see," responded Gillian, and made a split-second decision. He didn't want young Brampingham for an assistant, but he would, out of deference to good old Bill, give him a job as a clerk.

"Your father tells me that you were voted the best-looking fellow of your class?"

The remark seemed to increase the visitor's discomfort. His blush deepened. He looked intently at the great shining cuspidor near the famous criminal lawyer's feet. He said, "Yes, sir," in a husky whisper.

"What I'd like to know," Gillian went on, "is why you don't get a job at Hollywood. You're better-looking than Jack Barrymore or John Gilbert or any of them."

"I've had offers," Bill's son admitted. "One movie scout offered me fifteen thousand a year to start. I turned it down."

"You made a mistake. It will be a long time before you're earning fifteen thousand a year as a lawyer."

"I'd rather," Montmorency declared, "make fifteen hundred a year as a lawyer than go into the movies at fifteen hundred thousand."

His answer nettled Gillian, who said crisply:

"You mean, you're an idealist. I don't think you'll find that criminal law is a comfortable place for an idealist. You've probably come here with the notion that Justice is a beautiful, honest-minded lady who somehow or the other always does the right thing by the good and downtrodden. That's all wrong, Mr. Brampingham. Justice is blind and her right hand careth not what her left hand doeth. I threw my last ideal overboard years ago. I discovered that justice must be meted out by individuals who do not care to what despicable lengths they go. You have to amend that old saying to: All's fair in love, war and law courts."

"I see," answered the young man, but his eyes were vague.

"I do not believe," said Gillian,

warmly, "that I am the kind of lawyer you would care to work for. It is common knowledge that I have bought judges, bribed juries and put countless perjured witnesses on the stand, in order to bring in what I considered to be a just verdict for my clients. I do not defend a man unless I am convinced he is innocent. But once I am sure of his innocence, there are no lengths to which I won't go—and haven't gone—to get him freed. Now, that is not idealism. My enemies call me a shyster, a crook, a scoundrel. And they are not libeling me. It is true that I am a shyster, a crook and a scoundrel. I am merely making it easy for you to say that you don't care to work for a man whom even the newspapers call a fox."

"I could learn a lot from you," young Brampingham said quietly.

"You would learn too much from me. You would learn how rotten the average court room is, how crooked the procedure is, how unfair and cruel the whole legal machine is—and you would take to drink or ruin yourself somehow because you couldn't stand it."

"I'll take that risk, Mr. Hazeltine. As you probably noticed that letter from my father is a year old. When I quit working for Judge Lorgan, I went out for a visit with my father. That was a year ago. He gave me the letter. Since then I have been here in Greenboro. I've spent most of my time in court rooms while you were handling cases. I've heard almost every word you've uttered in a court room in the past year."

Gillian smiled. "And you still want to work for me?"

"More than ever!" Montmorency said emphatically. "I know your methods. I know your line of attack. The fact is, I *must* work for you."

He paused and looked intently at the famous criminal lawyer.

"Why?" Gillian dryly asked.

"Because my worst enemy is working for your worst enemy—or isn't the present district attorney your worst enemy?"

GILLIAN nodded. "Yes; Bert Yistle probably heads the list of people in this town who would give a great deal to see me drawn and quartered."

"And his new assistant, Jake Thurbo, is the man I hate more than any other living human!" declared Montmorency. "Your practice brings you into constant clashes with Mr. Yistle. If I were your assistant, I would have, against me, Jake Thurbo. That is another reason why I have waited so long to bring this letter to you, Mr. Hazeltine. Yesterday Mr. Yistle made Thurbo his assistant."

"Tell me," Gillian directed, "about your feud with Jake Thurbo."

"We went through college together," responded the young man. "The very moment we met, we hated each other. On our first meeting he called me the name I carried through college—'Angel Face.' Mr. Hazeltine, can you picture carrying that name through college?"

"What other name," Gillian countered, "did you carry through college?"

"'Buck,'" said Angel Face Brampingham. "You see, both father and I come from Ohio—the Buckeye State."

"Buck," Gillian approved, "is a good name. Go on with your story, Buck. I am intensely interested."

"Jake Thurbo," Buck complied, "made both the football team and the boxing team. But he wasn't such a wow. Oh, he made good, but his con-

ceit used to drive me wild, Mr. Hazeltine. He is the most conceited ass in the world. To make a long story short, the senior class voted him the fellow most likely to succeed. It sort of put us together, if you see what I mean."

"It makes an interesting situation," said Gillian, "the best-looking man and the one most likely to succeed, hating each other. Buck, did you by any chance come to this city because you somehow hoped to put it over on Jake Thurbo?"

"I came to Greenboro because I wanted to become, in time, your junior partner, Mr. Hazeltine. If I can put Jake Thurbo where he belongs, damn him, I will be mighty happy. And it is pretty important, because, you see, we are both crazy about the same girl."

"Ah, yes," Gillian sighed, "just to round things off, you both would be. Who found her first?"

"I did. She's Ronald Parr's sister. Ron was a fraternity brother of mine. I had her down for a prom—a blind date—and fell for her like a ton of bricks. Jake met her at the prom."

"And gave her a rush?"

"I hope to tell the world he gave her a rush! And he's still at it."

"And so are you."

"Well, I'm doing what I can. I'm rather broke, you see. Do you think I would let a fine, splendid, decent girl like Jane Parr marry a conceited, vain, worthless skunk like Jake Thurbo?"

"You'd even marry the girl to save her from him," Gillian put in deftly.

"You bet I would! Say—you're kidding me, Mr. Hazeltine. Well, it's all right. I don't mind kidding."

Buck Brampingham checked himself. The phone on the side of Gillian's desk was tinkling. Gillian picked up the receiver, said "hello" and then, in an aside to the young man:

"Here's one of our worst enemies right now. The district attorney himself."

CHAPTER II.

SOUPY JOE.

INTO the mouthpiece Gillian said: "Hello, Bert. What's wrong?"

"I want to know," came the rasping voice of Adelbert Yistle over the wire, "if you're going to let Soupy Joe retain you in this Viaretto case. They say down at headquarters that he's yelling for you and expects you to represent him when he appears in homicide court this morning."

"I haven't been approached," said Gillian. "Why?"

"There's a particular reason," answered the district attorney, "why I don't want you to take the case, Gill. If you do, I'll have to do the prosecuting myself. If you don't, I can go away and do some much-needed fishing."

"I'll make a bargain with you," Gillian proposed. "Go away and catch your fish and I'll promise not to touch the case."

"Thanks," said Mr. Yistle gratefully and, with a sigh, hung up.

Gillian swung around in his swivel chair to Buck Brampingham.

"That," he said, "means your worst enemy will handle this Viaretto affair. The district attorney is going fishing. Thurbo will prosecute Soupy Joe. And it will be an easy case, because Soupy has a criminal record as long as your arm and looks like the kind of man who would kill a helpless woman for her jewels. Can't you imagine any half-baked lawyer playing on a tallow-headed jury with those facts and railroading Soupy to the chair?"

Gillian stopped, surprised by the expression that had come into Montmorency Wilberton Brampingham's face. The blue eyes were flashing. The nostrils were twitching. The handsome countenance was livid with fury.

"Take the case, Mr. Hazeltine," he begged. "Take the case and let me defend Soupy. I know how. Oh, just let me get into a court room with Jake Thurbo on the other side!"

"You're too idealistic," said Gillian. "This is an ugly case. You'd have to go up against perjured witnesses by the quire. It's too sordid, too unclean a case for you, Buck. Maybe later on I'll give you a chance. For the present satisfy yourself with being one of my clerks. Rome wasn't built in five minutes. Take it easy."

"But I've got to go into court against Jake Thurbo. It isn't fair for that poor man, Soupy Joe, to be sent to the chair just to satisfy Thurbo's vanity and conceit and greed. What kind of justice is that? And another thing: It's vitally important that I save Miss Parr from Jake Thurbo without delay. She told me in so many words that she is undecided between the two of us, and it is up to us both to show which wants her most. Some kind of actual demonstration of our intentions. If I go into court to defend Soupy Joe against that conceited yellow dog, I'm sure I would win. And if I won, Jane would have to accept that as an answer. And she would!"

Gillian was wagging his head. "I don't see how you could win, Buck. The odds against you are too great. Soupy evidently has no alibi. Or certainly no usable alibi. If he wasn't killing Rosie at the time of the murder, he was probably robbing some house. How can you defend a fellow like Soupy? He's hopeless."

"Just give me the chance!" Buck Brampingham begged.

"No. You're too idealistic. A lawyer, to handle a case like this, must know how to get his hands good and dirty, because nothing will be flung but mud."

Miss Barrow opened the door eight inches and inserted her head.

"An old woman out in the waiting room is raising the devil, Mr. Hazeltine. She says she is Soupy Joe's mother. She wants to see you immediately."

"All right, send her in."

"Let me wait," pleaded Buck Brampingham. "Let me hear what she has to say."

"It won't do you any good," said Gillian. "I am not going to let you defend Soupy Joe."

MISS BARROW ushered Mrs. Gorlish into the private office. She was a frowzy old lady. She wore a black broadcloth suit, not only outmoded but green with age. An unbelievably fanciful hat, littered with broken blossoms and cracked cherries, sat at a rakish angle on her untidy hair. The tip of her thin long nose was pink and it looked moist. She appeared to be a confirmed drunkard.

"Oh, Mr. Hazeltine," she began in a quavering voice, "my poor, poor boy is locked up again, an'—"

"Stop that acting," Gillian rudely cut her off. "Where was Soupy when the Viaretto girl was shot?"

"He was home in bed, sleepin'. I'll take my oath on a Bible—"

"You took your oath on a Bible about two years ago that you didn't know anything about the silk stolen in that warehouse job—and then they found eight bolts of it under your bed."

"Mr. Hazeltine, I hope God strikes

me dead if I ain't tellin' you the truth. Joe was home in bed. He's got a job. For two years he's been goin' straight. He's been drivin' a taxicab, makin' good honest money, an'—"

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Gorlish, but I've just promised the district attorney on my word of honor that I would not touch this case. And I won't touch it. It's a nasty business. You know that Soupy and the Viaretto girl had a love affair. Everything's against Joe. If he takes my advice, he'll plead guilty and throw himself on the court's mercy."

"But he's innocent, Mr. Hazeltine!" the frowzy old lady wailed. "I'm tellin' you, he was home in bed, sleepin' like an angel lamb when that hussy was shot. Joe didn't do it."

"Who did?"

"Those who know ain't talkin'."

"Ask Ben Driscoll, of Hoyt, Malevinsky & Driscoll, to defend Soupy. Ben needs the publicity and he'll take the case in a jiffy."

"I don't want Driscoll to defend Joe. I want you, Mr. Hazeltine. There ain't another lawyer in this here country clever enough to get Joe out of that jam. I know it an' you know it. Please don't sit there frozen like that. I'm an old woman. I want my poor boy to stay straight, Mr. Hazeltine."

"Nothing doing," Gillian reiterated.

Montmorency Wilberton Brampingham cleared his throat and said, deeply: "Mrs. Gorlish, I'll defend your son."

The old woman fixed hawklike eyes on him. "An' who are you?" she snapped.

"My name is Brampingham. I—"

"He's going to work for me," Gillian explained.

"An' you'll work along with him on the case?" cried Mrs. Gorlish.

"No," said Gillian.

Soupy Joe's mother lifted her chin. "Do I want any young smart Aleck goin' into court when my boy may be sent to the chair?" she demanded shrilly. "Not I!" She arose and went to the door. "You might change your mind, Mr. Hazeltine—"

"Not a chance," said Gillian. "This case smells too strong for me—and I've known some pretty bad smells in my time. I'm sorry, Mrs. Gorlish."

"You can go to the devil!" snarled the old woman.

Gillian looked at Buck Brampingham as the door closed. His eyes were glinting, and his handsome face was pale.

"Still want to defend Soupy?" Gillian asked.

"Yes, sir; I do."

"Come on over to the jail," said Gillian, "and we'll have a little talk with him. I'm determined to convince you that you don't want to touch this case any more than I do."

SOUPY JOE GORLISH, cringing behind the bars of his cell door, was a caricature of defeated humanity. With his white, lined face, the prisoner looked fifty, yet he was probably only thirty. He was more than slightly bald. He had weak eyes, a weak mouth, a weak chin. His shoulders sagged.

"Soupy," Gillian said to him, "I don't want to rouse your hopes, so I'll hasten to say that I am not going to defend you."

The feeble glow in the ex-convict's eyes was snuffed out. His shoulders seemed to sag, his mouth to droop, more than before.

"I was countin' on your helpin' me out, Mr. Hazeltine."

"I've helped you out of a half dozen

scrapes, Joe; and you never keep your word. Every time I get you out of a jam, you promise to go straight, and the first thing I know, you're up to your ears in trouble again. I positively will not touch the present mess. I'm through with you."

"But I'm innocent, Mr. Hazeltine. I didn't kill that dame. Honest to God, I was home in bed, sound asleep, when it happened. I've been goin' straight for two solid years, Mr. Hazeltine."

"You'll have a hard time convincing a jury that you were home in bed and asleep at nine P.M., Soupy."

"But I'm working from eleven P.M. to eight A.M., drivin' a taxi," the little man whined. "My boss will testify to that."

"It won't help," said Gillian. "Everybody on the waterfront knows that you and Rosie were sweeties a few years ago. They know she jilted you. If you didn't drop her, who did?"

"I don't know, Mr. Hazeltine. If I did, I'd of told those big gorillas when they third-degreed me last night."

"Did Walsh persuade you to sign a confession?"

"Sure, he did! I'd of signed anything, Mr. Hazeltine! They beat me on the legs with a rubber hose until I couldn't stand it."

"Where were you when they made the pinch?"

"I told you, Mr. Hazeltine; I was home in bed, sound asleep. I was layin' there, dreamin' without a care in the world, when they come in an' grabbed me so hard I yelled—right in my sleep. They wouldn't even give me time to get dressed. They hustled me inta the wagon in my nightshirt."

"What have they got on you?"

"Nothin', Mr. Hazeltine. I tell you, I didn't shoot that dame. She don't mean a solitary thing in my life. I've been goin' straight because I'm keepin' company with the nicest kid in the world. She's a clerk down at the five-and-ten, an' she trusts me. She's the first person I ever knew who trusted me, an' it's kept me goin' straight, an' it would keep me goin' straight. Now this had to happen. I've been framed cold, Mr. Hazeltine."

"Why?" snapped the young man who had accompanied the criminal lawyer.

Soupy looked at him—and looked at him again. Hitherto he had been unaware of Buck Brampingham's presence, so interested was he in Gillian Hazeltine. Soupy answered:

"You know how it is. A cop hates a crook. I used to be a crook. Now that I'm goin' straight an' tryin' to be decent for that girl, they won't give me a break. That's all. I've been in stir so many times they can't get used to seein' me outa stir."

"Bunk!" growled Gillian. "These cops are as anxious to see you go straight as they are to catch you when you turn sour. This young man isn't as easy as he looks, Soupy—and he wants to take your case."

SOUPY JOE looked sharply through the bars at the handsome young man. "Are you a lawyer?"

"I am," said Buck Brampingham crisply.

"Workin' for Mr. Hazeltine?"

"That's the idea."

Soupy shrugged and grinned. "Sure, you can take my case. Tickled to deat'."

"Let's get this straight," Gillian put in. "If this young man takes your case, I'll have absolutely nothing to do with it."

"Then, he's out," said Soupy. "I don't want no amachoors tryin' their

stuff on me. I'm lookin' the chair square in the nose, I am. An' what's more," he went on, a little indignantly, "I know what this case means to a green lawyer. I seen the papers. It means a whole lot of publicity. Well, I ain't goin' to the hot seat just to make some green young lawyer famous."

"I'm certain," Buck said sharply, "that I can free you, Mr. Gorlish."

"What makes you so certain, mister?"

"I know you're innocent."

Soupy's grin became a little less of a sneer. "What makes you know it, mister?"

"I can tell by looking at you and by listening to you that you did not kill Rose Viaretto."

"You can?" Soupy gasped.

"I certainly can!"

The criminal looked with amazement at Gillian. "Did you hear that, Mr. Hazeltine?"

"I heard it."

"Is this guy a real lawyer?"

"Certainly, he's a lawyer."

"Well, he's the first lawyer what ever told me I looked innocent about anything I'd been dragged in for. I guess this guy must be a purty good lawyer, Mr. Hazeltine."

"You're entitled to your guess," Gillian admitted.

The contact with Montmorency Wilberton Brampingham seemed to have put new life into Soupy Joe. His eyes were brighter. There were spots of color on his sallow cheeks. His shoulders seemed to sag less. But his amazement continued.

"So you think I look innocent, do you?" he demanded eagerly.

"I certainly do, Mr. Gorlish."

"Well, can you tie that?" the prisoner marveled. He said suddenly: "I guess you're a good enough lawyer to go inta court an' defen' me. If you'll do it, it's jake with me. If you're anywhere near as good at law as you are at looks, I guess I oughta have a purty fair chance. Eh, Mr. Hazeltine?"

Gillian said nothing. He tried to make his smile seem benevolent. He was on the point of warning Soupy Joe not to take such a risk. Montmorency Wilberton Brampingham was so green that the dew was still upon him. He was not only green, but he was an idealist. He would carry into court that ideal of justice triumphing over wrong. He would run his head into the cruel jaws of perjury and every kind of legal trickery. He would be a lamb to the slaughter. Poor Soupy! Poor Buck!

To himself Gillian said: "I will not interfere. This ought to be a show worth watching."

CHAPTER III.

INTO THE LION'S DEN!

MR. HAZELTINE left Montmorency Wilberton Brampingham in conference with Soupy Joe Gorlish and returned to his office. Seating himself at the desk, he immediately called his house. His Japanese butler, Toro, answered. Gillian requested that Mrs. Hazeltine be called to the phone.

The criminal lawyer was tremendously in love with his young wife. Little of interest that transpired in the course of his business was not sooner or later reported to that beautiful redhead.

"Darling," said Gillian, when her sweet, gay voice came into his ear, "I have a surprise for you. I am taking my life into my hands when I bring it around for you to look at—"

"A new roadster?" she caroled.

"No. Lord, no!"

"That diamond-and-emerald bracelet I admired in Crossett's window yesterday afternoon?"

"No, no, Vee; you've got me wrong. This is something that hasn't cost me a cent. It's a man. A young man. The handsomest fellow that ever lived. Apollo Belvedere looked like a bum in comparison. Placed beside Barrymore, he would make Jack look like a complete washout. His name is Montmorency Wilberton Brampingham."

"I don't believe it!" cried Vee.

"You will, darling, when you see. He is the son of a fellow I played football with in college. He is as big as a moose and so handsome that he can scarcely be looked at with the naked eye. The girls in the outer office are still draped over their typewriters, unconscious, from a single glimpse of him."

"You're bringing him home for dinner?"

"Worse than that. I want you to arrange a little dinner party. It seems that his worst enemy is now Bert Yistle's assistant. A character by the name of Jake Thurbo. Jake and Buck—"

"Who?" inquired Vee.

"That is what Montmorency Wilberton Brampingham insists on calling himself—Buck. Jake and Buck were classmates. They hate each other like strange wildcats. I believe they are to meet in a legal battle over this Viaretto murder. At least, Buck is defending the human rabbit which the police grabbed as being the easiest available man to convict. But that isn't all. Both these youngsters are goofy about the same girl. Darling, I ask you—is that a situation, or isn't it?"

"Would it be safe to have both of them here at the same time for dinner?"

"Who," Gillian responded, "wants it to be safe?" Did I take you all the way to Madrid, when we were in Marseilles, to see a bullfight, because it was safe? Did I drag you to New York to watch Mr. Tunney slice that Australian chopping-block into ribbons because it was safe?"

HIS wife was laughing. She said: "All right, honey. The blood can run in thick streams and I'll sit there and adore everything, if that will please you. Who else do you want for this orgy?"

"Why, the girl, of course!"

"Is she a nice girl?"

"Presumably they do not come nicer. She is Bob Parr's daughter."

"Jane Parr!" Vee squealed. "I played bridge with Jane at the country club not ten days ago. I'll call her immediately. I'll make her break any date she has with anybody. G'by, sweetheart!"

WITH a smile that could almost be described as smug, Gillian now put in a call for the district attorney's office. He asked for Mr. Thurbo. And presently a gruff young voice responded.

"This," said Gillian pleasantly, "is Gillian Hazeltine."

"Yes," answered the gruff young voice.

"If you are free this evening, Mr. Thurbo, I should like very much to have you come to a dinner party at my house."

Jake Thurbo gasped: "Good Lord, I'm sorry; but I've got a date I can't possibly break."

"Is it, by any chance, with Jane Parr?"

There were several gasps at this. Then: "Yes, Mr. Hazeltine."

"Miss Parr will be at the party. Can we expect you at about six thirty?"

"Why— Uh— Yes, sir! You bet! I'd be delighted, Mr. Hazeltine. It certainly is— I want you to know— That is—"

"I understand," said Gillian. "I'll see you at six thirty, then."

Still smiling that almost smug smile, he pressed a button on his desk. When Miss Barrow appeared, he ordered:

"Send somebody over to homicide court right away to tell Mr. Brampingham to get in touch with me by telephone as soon as possible."

Miss Barrow loitered a moment.

"Have you hired him, Mr. Hazeltine?" she breathlessly wanted to know.

"You can post a bulletin for the girls in the outer office," Gillian answered, "that it is on the lap of the gods; the gods of famine, vengeance, love and the ye-gods-and-little-fishes god. I am giving him an acid test. If he survives the acid and emerges purified of a few foolish ideals and nobly shining with hard-boiled cynicism, I will take him on as my assistant."

"You know you ought to have an assistant, Mr. Hazeltine," Miss Barrow scolded. "It's a shame the way you make a truck horse of yourself."

"So my wife says," Gillian agreed. "But I haven't much faith in his acid-surviving powers. I am inclined to suspect that Angel Face Buck Montmorency Wilberton Brampingham is scheduled to take a terrible beating."

When Gillian introduced young Mr. Brampingham to his wife, Vee gazed at the golden youth with sparkling-eyed incredulity and seized the first polite opportunity to spirit Gillian off into another room for a private conference.

"Now," she said excitedly, "tell me what it's all about."

The famous criminal lawyer looked at her with a fond smile. After four years of marriage, he was still convinced that she was the most beautiful woman in the world, and the smartest. Her hair was flame-red; her eyes were green as emeralds; her skin was like cream. Her shoulders fitted comfortably just under his arm.

"I have concealed nothing," Gillian replied gravely. "I have no knives up my sleeves."

"Just the same," persisted Vee, "there is dirty work at the crossroads or you wouldn't be so smug."

"My cards are on the table," said Gillian. "The young man, over my most violent protests, insists on defending Soupy Joe Gorlish. I am but an innocent bystander."

VEE sniffed. "I have seen you innocently bystanding before. Usually, just before some Christian martyr is tossed in to the lions. I know just what happened, darling. You aren't fooling me one bit. Your violent protests were prods. With that diabolical ingenuity with which we are familiar, you wriggled things around so that this poor lamb would go into that horrible court room to defend Soupy."

The famous criminal lawyer looked a little uncomfortable.

"All," Vee quickly added, "in the sacred cause of something-or-other."

"To be quite frank—" Gillian began.

"Ah, yes," she mocked him, "when you are caught, you always begin your alibi with that."

"To be quite frank," Gillian repeated, "I am badly in need of a clever young assistant."

"So you are testing him?"

"Yes, dear."

"And having a nice, gory Roman holiday at the same time!"

"Look here," Gillian retorted gruffly, "if that kid wants to go into the arena and toy with the lions, why should I deprive myself of a ringside seat?"

Vee said seriously: "Darling, I think you're cruel. You could have talked with him and found out in five minutes whether or not he was worth trying as your assistant. I thought you prided yourself on your snap-judgment of men!"

"I do," Gillian defended himself, "but this boy has me puzzled. Supposing you talk to him. I've never yet seen you fall down on the job of sizing up any man I have brought to the house. Try your art. But don't let him dazzle you."

"He certainly is bee-you-ti-ful."

"Bee-you-ti-ful," Gillian agreed, "but—" And hesitated.

"Dumb?"

"Idealistic. It means the same thing—in a court room. I can't use a half-baked assistant. He must be hard-boiled."

"Like yourself."

"I admit being hard-boiled."

"Very well, darling. I'll spend the evening in an attempt to solve the riddle of Sphinx Montmorency Wilberton Brampingham. Under that angelic exterior, is there a soft, gooey idealist—or a hard-fisted criminal lawyer? Is that the question?"

"That's the question."

"Now, about dinner, dear. Do you wish to have it served in the dining room or out on the terrace? I thought you might prefer the terrace, because it would be so much easier to rope it off into a square ring, and between courses the two contestants when you clanged a bell— Stop pinching me, you brute! I don't see why you can't have your lovely Roman holiday begin at home—Gillian, I don't love you when you're rough! Stop it! What is it, Toro?"

Breathless and pink, she broke away from Gillian.

Their Japanese butler, unsmiling, imperturbable as an Oriental god of bronze, bowed at the doorway and announced in impeccable English:

"Miss Parr and Mr. Thurbo wish to be announced, madam."

"Where are they?" Vee gasped.

"In the living room, madam."

"And where is Mr. Brampingham?"

"He also is in the living room, madam."

"Gillian," the beautiful red-head breathed, clutching at his hand. "Hurry! They will be at each other's throats!"

CHAPTER IV.

NO FALSE MODESTY.

BUT the two hardy young enemies were not at each other's throats when Mr. and Mrs. Hazeltine entered. They were cordially shaking hands, and Buck Brampingham was saying:

"Well, well, Jake; this is certainly great!"

And the district attorney's new assistant was cordially affirming:

"By golly, Buck; this sure is swell!"

Beyond them, wearing the smile of a witch who ought to be turned over to the crew of a ducking stool, stood Miss Jane Parr—a radiant young brunette, with imps in her dark eyes, becoming color in her cheeks and quantities of a certain kind of appeal that has been widely advertised. She was almost as pretty as Vee Hazeltine, which is saying a great deal.

"I understand," Buck Brampingham pleasantly said, "that you have become the assistant district attorney."

The two young men smiled charmingly at each other.

"Yes," affirmed Jake Thurbo, "and I heard the rumor that the greatest criminal lawyer in fifteen States has just taken you on as his understudy."

Gillian looked at Jake Thurbo appraisingly. He saw a tall, well-built young man with smooth, black hair, dark, powerful eyes, a dark complexion and a bulldog jaw.

"Where did you hear that rumor?" Gillian softly inquired.

"I think it leaked out of headquarters, Mr. Hazeltine. A tabloid reporter asked me about it. Of course, I didn't confirm it, because I didn't know. Buck, I want to congratulate you!"

"It's a little premature," said Gillian. "Buck is not my assistant—yet. If he licks the daylights out of you in this Viaretto case, I'm going to give him the job."

Gillian saw the flash of hate in Jake Thurbo's eyes. But the question came fairly purring out of him:

"Buck, are *you* defending Soupy Joe Gorlish?"

Buck smiled his beautiful smile, gave his enemy such a glance as one archangel might have given another, and nodded. "That's the dope, Jake. Soupy retained me this morning."

The two enemies, almost toe to toe, as if awaiting the bell, wore the same charming smiles. They generated into the atmosphere, Vee declared afterward, enough electricity to electrocute poor Soupy Joe a half dozen times.

"Well, that's just great, Ange—I mean, Buck, old trouper. I wish you luck."

"The same to you, Jake, old-timer!"

"May the best man win!" put in Jane Parr with an innocent voice. Gillian caught her eye. Her color was heightened. The spark of deviltry in her brown eyes was almost a flame.

Toro entered the room on noiseless feet and said to his master:

"Mr. Jack Sniffen, of the *Mirror*, wants you on the telephone, Mr. Hazeltine."

Gillian excused himself and hastened to the telephone. A sharp, cynical, nasal voice in the receiver accosted him.

"'Lo, Gill. Is there anything in this rumor that Bert Yistle's new assistant and the young fellow who is going to defend Soupy Joe are sworn enemies and in love with the same skirt?"

"Where did you hear that?"

"I hear all the dirt. Is it straight?"

"Yes."

"DO you know whether or not this young Thurbo is going to conduct the prosecution personally?"

"I believe he is. But don't quote me on that, Jack. I am nothing but a disinterested onlooker. If you want the story and interviews with the parties involved, hop out here. We're all having dinner together."

"Thanks, Gill; I'll grab a cab."

"Do you want to bring a photographer?"

"Naturally!"

Gillian returned to the living room. Toro was just announcing dinner. The two sworn enemies moved out of the room, the golden head and the black one, towering over the bright red head of Vee Hazeltine, who, walking between them, looked like a woman in miniature.

"If," said the low, sweet voice of Jane Parr beside Gillian, "you could

somehow only induce them to put on the gloves!"

She looked up at him with a winning smile.

"Jane Parr," said Gillian gravely, "you and I understand each other perfectly."

"Was I right in suspecting that you wanted a little word with me in private?"

Gillian gazed at her with honest admiration. "Quite right. After all, you're the cause of all this."

"A girl usually is, isn't she?" said Jane brightly. "Look at the way Antony and Cæsar acted over Cleopatra!"

"One thing I like about you modern girls," Gillian confessed, "is that you haven't any false modesty. Ranking yourself with the dangerous great women of history is all right with me, if you can prove you're one of them."

"I'm working along the right lines, am I not? Isn't the first rule to stir up a lot of excitement?"

Gillian nodded.

"And if a woman can turn plain clay men into gods, she's working in the right direction, is she not? I have made these two lads progress farther in a couple of years than they would have done, if left alone, in ten. At the end of this trial, they will be famous."

"The one who wins it will be famous," Gillian corrected her. "Who are you betting on?"

"I can't decide," Jane seriously answered, and her fine dark brows were puckered. "Mr. Hazeltine, I've known both these boys for years and years and years."

"Meaning about three?"

"No, four. I admire Jake for his bulldog tenacity and pile-driver methods, but I often wonder if he has a soul. I admire Buck for his soul, but I often wonder if he has the bulldog tenacity and pile-driver methods necessary for criminal law."

"Do you mean to say," Gillian exclaimed, "that, after knowing Buck Brampingham for four years, you haven't yet learned the truth about him?"

"I admit it. Have you, Mr. Hazeltine?"

"No, Jane; but I haven't known him for four years. I am beginning to understand the nature of your predicament. You like them both. You admire them both, but—"

"That's just it. *But!*"

"I don't want to seem inquisitive, but are you really on the level, Jane? Don't misunderstand me. After knowing these boys for four years, haven't you been able to make up your mind which one you love?"

"NO!" she wailed. "I haven't! I can't! I've stayed awake nights. I've thought and wondered and stewed and analyzed, but none of it gets me anywhere. I'd love a bulldog with a soul, but not a bulldog without a soul or a soul without a bulldog, if you see what I mean."

"Do you think the Viaretto trial will decide the issue?"

"I'm confident of it. But I'm afraid that Buck will be shamed, humiliated, and horribly whipped."

"In other words, you'd prefer to see him win. That means he is the one you really love."

"Not so fast, Dr. Freud! I have a motherly interest in both of them. The man who wins I think I will marry. It is only my motherly interest that makes me afraid that Buck will be horribly whipped. I think it would crush him. I think it would spoil his life."

Jane Parr's glowing brown eyes appealed to Gillian.

"Do you think I am being awfully cold-blooded about this? Modern girls don't cover up their real purposes under a lot of sticky sentimentality as girls used to. Girls used to be just as shrewd and analytical as I'm being, but they weren't frank enough to admit it. I'm being perfectly honest when I say that I honestly can't decide between Jake and Buck. I love them both equally. I am going to watch that trial as a scientist watches the squirming and wriggling of two germs under his microscope. When that trial is over, I will know which man I want for the father of my children. That's frank enough, isn't it?"

Gillian grinned, nodded. "Have you ever attended a murder trial?"

"Never. I've never even been in a court room."

"It will be a novel and thrilling experience. This murder trial is going to be more dramatic and exciting than most. Just wait until these two young gladiators face each other in the arena!"

"I can imagine!" she breathed.

"But what puzzles me," said Gillian, "is this. What will you do if the trial proves that Jake is a bulldog without a soul, and Buck a soul without a bulldog?"

"In that case, I will tell them both to roll their hoops. And I will do so without the slightest fear that my conscience will bother me. After all, I have goaded each of them already to heights that they didn't dream of aspiring to until I started to snap the whip! But I don't think that will happen. I am convinced that, when the dust has settled and the smoke cleared, I will have in my possession a—a—"

"Soulful bulldog?" Gillian finished.

She laughed and took his arm. They went out on the terrace. The last rays of the setting sun played upon the golden glory of Buck Brampingham's rippling, curly hair. They made of that handsome young man a saint.

Gillian, gazing at that golden nimbus, involuntarily shook his head. He could not visualize Angel Face Brampingham winning the Viaretto case nor revealing traits of a bulldog. He could only see the young fellow terribly humiliated and whipped.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

A Sailor's Garden

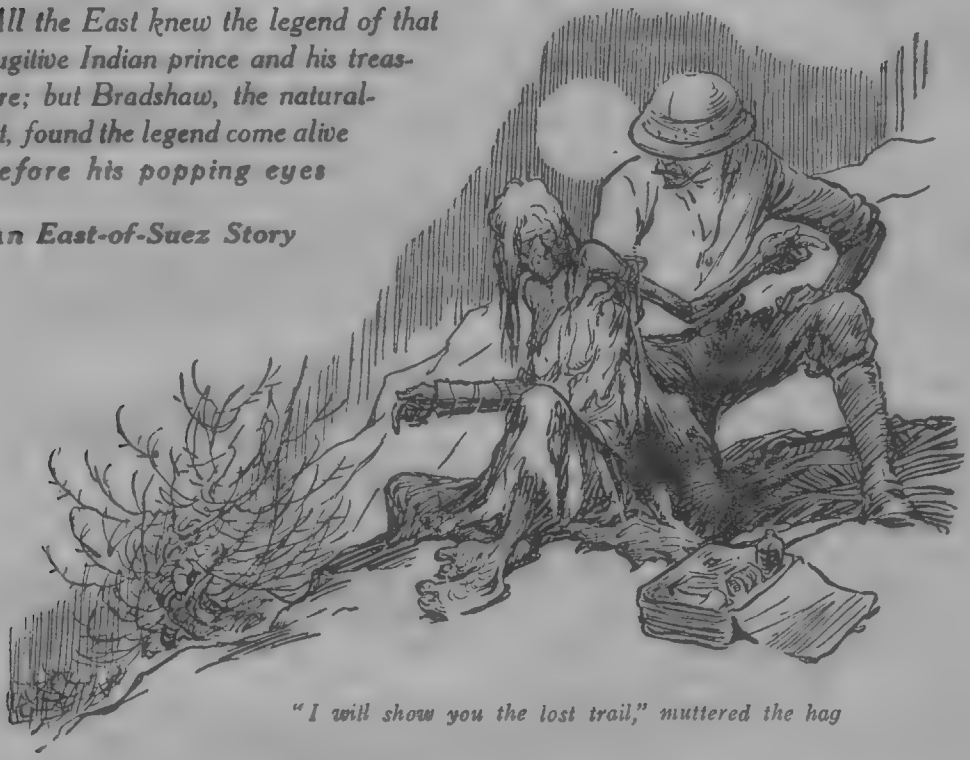
WHEN a down-East sea captain retired from the barkentine which he had navigated for over thirty years to settle down in Eastport, Maine, he missed the blue horizons and cobalt seas so much that he built a fair imitation of a ship's bridge on the roof of his house. On it he hung a ship's bell, which was rung regularly for meals.

He planted a large garden with blue flowers only, larkspur, bluebells, forget-me-nots, violets, myosotis, hyacinths, dark blue pansies, blue morning-glories, all in profusion, to bloom at various seasons. In the middle he set an ancient ship's figurehead. He spent most of his time on the "bridge" looking out to sea through binoculars; he took the time at noon every day by the sun; and gazing out over the blue blossoms below he perhaps gave himself the illusion of sailing over sapphire seas. *Minna Irving.*

The Ruby of Suratan Singh

All the East knew the legend of that fugitive Indian prince and his treasure; but Bradshaw, the naturalist, found the legend come alive before his popping eyes

An East-of-Suez Story



"I will show you the lost trail," muttered the hag

By THEODORE ROSCOE

"RIOTING in Calcutta! Mob Storms Bazaar! Natives Stone Fire and Police Brigades! Many Injured!"

Bradshaw let the *Daily Mail* slip from his fingers; and the headlines yelled up at me from the floor. The naturalist shook his head.

"Poor old India," he said, staring off across the Malacca Strait toward that horizon beyond which she lay. A westering sun was nesting there, gilding the tousled cloud-tips with a light that enameled red the water of our bay. The half-glow found a frown on Bradshaw's face. He sighed.

"Poor old India. She can't seem to understand. She can't seem to be understood. So she's rioting again."

"Trouble," I worried, "for Britain."

He agreed. "India's restless. Britain has done wonders for her. Educated, doctored, fostered, renovated her. But Britain rules her. The father does everything for the kid; but what kid doesn't yearn for the day when he can paddle his own canoe? India's a nervous, hysterical, overgrown child, with all the fever of any other child born in tropic sunshine and malaria. Needs a ruling hand to raise her properly, but is too proud to think so. Poor kid."

"Is that what lies behind this?" I queried, pointing at the newspaper bearing its message of disturbance and alarm.

"I'll tell you what's behind it!" The naturalist's lean hands went seeking into his jacket, and extracted a much-weathered Kalabash. "I'll tell you," he repeated, when his teeth were leaking pipe-smoke. "And I may get across my idea. But the idea's incidental. The story's the thing. I might say, you're the first chap I ever told it to; and I wouldn't tell it now if we weren't alone on this veranda, if you hadn't seen North India for yourself, and if it didn't seem to fit in. And you'll have to believe it, old man, because it actually happened to *me*. You won't want to believe it, though, because it's the story of the ruby of Suratan Singh!"

"The ruby of Suratan Singh!" I gasped. "Good Lord, you aren't going to tell me you know anything about *that* thing!"

"I know *all* about it," he nodded.

And this is the story he told me:

QUEER how legends get under way, how far they travel, how fat they grow. Take this story of Suratan's vast treasure. First time I heard about it was in the opera house in Warren, Ohio. The speaker had sideburns and stereopticon slides and a lecture on India; and when he orated about Suratan making his get-away after leaving that astonishing message to his satrap brother, every kid in Warren, Ohio, was ready to run away and find the Himalaya Mountains.

Few years later I was steaming out of New York Harbor, listening to an old missionary enchant the smoke-room with the same yarn. Between Marseilles and Aden I heard the tale thirteen times, each time getting better and more authentic. After some years out here, I got so used to the story that I told it a couple of times myself, planned thirty times to cash in on it, and finally forgot it. Every adventurer who'd cut his sign on the East-smitten trail between Hadramaut and the Kurils had taken a shot at locating that ruby.

According to legend, though, that ruby should have been easy to find as the rising sun. The boys between Aden and China claimed the stone was as big as a fist. This was substantiated by the assertion that no Hindu would have risked his life to carry off a smaller and less precious piece of treasure. China Coast logic. Certainly the terrified Suratan had made a gargantuan effort to save himself and his fortune.

It must have taken some mighty unusual driving-force to get that fellow through the British line in those gory days. You remember the story. The Sepoy Rebellion had burst like a bomb. The native troops had mutinied from one end of the land to the other, and in that particular July of 1857 the country was knee-deep in blood of massacred whites.

Nana Sahib, the red rajah, had just pulled off his horrible Cawnpore slaughter and was making his escape into the hills. The British under Havelock were after him, hot-foot, wild with sorrow and rage. It would go damned hard with the rebel who was caught by those infuriated British soldiers.

It looked as if one Suratan Singh, prince of Rohilkhand, was going to be one such. He was a Hindu Brahmin of reputed wealth and the usual bad habits. He ruled an unruly corner of India, and he'd loaned some of his

household troops to the ineffable Nana Sahib, which chalked him up in red ink for the British. The raging British soldiers pushed fast up into Suratan Singh's province, and it wasn't long before a detachment of 78th Highlanders had surrounded a little mud house in which the luckless Hindu was known to be hiding.

You can fancy things looked black for that nabob. The Scotchmen closing in on him had seen the bodies of mutilated white women, and they weren't going to coddle a man who'd loaned his troops to Nana Sahib. They were out for the head of Suratan Singh and meant to get it.

They didn't get it. Night came on just as they closed in on the little mud house, and they got there in time to find the bird had flown. Heaven only knows how that Hindu got himself through the ring of fierce Highlanders. But the only thing they found in the little mud room was a note scratched on a piece of leather. Suratan had written and signed the message in Hindee characters. It was addressed to his brother, a satrap in the adjacent province.

The message said Suratan was commending his soul to the Vedic gods and was going to attempt a get-away into the hills. It also mentioned the fact that he was taking with him the one thing he valued most:

"I carry with me my most precious treasure—my most precious ruby." His very words. Signed: Suratan Singh.

THE cheated Highlanders started after that slippery Hindu like tigers after a pig. They found his footprints when the moon came up, and they followed fast. But the Hindu was going like a wind. Through forty miles of *terai* jungle his tracks led those Highlanders.

Forty terrible miles through slough and upland swamp, bracken and brier-brush, up, down, back, around the Hindu's trail dragged; and that squad of Highlanders chased him. Night and day, for hours on end, they dogged his track, expecting every next step to bring them on the exhausted fugitive. Suratan held the lead. Then his trail thinned out in a tangle of Himalayan cañons. The exhausted Highlanders lost the track. They left three of their number to find it. The three were never seen or heard of again. Neither was Suratan Singh.

There you have the story of the disappearance of Suratan Singh and his precious ruby. The Highlanders who chased him and left three to go to certain death in the wilds had wanted him for his head. But after the Indian Mutiny blew over, the chase after Suratan Singh started again, and those who pursued his trail wanted something else. They wanted that gem. The story spread like contagion. Its truth was established by the message Suratan had scratched to his brother on that chunk of leather. Doomed men don't lie.

Stories started to float. The fugitive nabob had owned an enormous fortune before the Rebellion. His jewels had been famous from Nepal to Baluchistan. This ruby he had picked out of the lot and carried with him on his flight must have been priceless, beyond value. Every man and boy in the hills started to hunt Suratan's trail. Beach combers and pedants, scientists and sailors from the seven seas hit for that patch of Himalaya jungle where Suratan had vanished with his gem.

Though it clipped off some of the details, time hasn't dulled the legend;

to-day it's bright as ship's brass. That's why my heart gave a jump, skip and hop when, at the end of my first five years in South India, I got a letter from the Museum of Natural History in New York dispatching me to North India after specimens.

The letter ordered me to the border of Nepal, where I was to bag a pair of armored rhinoceroses. On the way, I knew I'd pass right through the village where, some forty years before, Suratan Singh with his treasure had started his dash for the hills.

I never got them their rhinos.

I WAS traveling along the road into Lukunpore when I heard the sound that stood the hair straight up on my head. Did you ever hear the dream-call of a person suffering a nightmare? It's a sound that tickles your spine. Well, that's what I heard—a weird sort of whoo-hoo-hooing, baying up from a ravine below me. The sun had started to drop behind the hills and an amber twilight lay among the mangroves patrolling the trail. That ghostly ululation wasn't nice to hear in an Asian dusk.

"What's that?" I barked at my native boys. My guide, a big fellow wearing nothing but a breech-clout and a magenta blossom behind his left ear, poked a finger at the yawning ravine. At first I was too startled to see anything. Then my eyes worked through the purple shadows and I saw something. A rag, a bone and a hank of hair were knotted together in a ragged thorn-bush halfway down the ravine.

The rag, bone and hair-hank wriggled in the thorns and voiced that weird dream-wail, and at first I thought it was live bait set out to decoy leopards. It was live leopard-bait, all right, but not the kind a hunter would use. I began to see it was an old woman.

She'd fallen off the trail and tumbled into the ravine and caught herself helpless in that clump of thorn. So I started down after her, good Samaritan fashion. The steep gully was nasty with brier, and it was a job getting down to her in that thick darkness.

I didn't get there any too soon. Just as I reached her thorn-trap a shadow slithered along the bottom of the ravine and I caught a glimpse of baleful yellow eyes. No wonder that old woman had hooted like a banshee.

Getting her out of that thorn and up that ravine-wall was a task for Hercules, but I did it. When I got her in my arms I had the creeps. The creature was a living mummy. She was lighter than paper, or I'd never have hoisted her up to the trail. A moon was wheeling in the sky when I finally deposited my burden in the dust of the path, and she lay there gasping like a fish.

My hill-boys spat in disgust. The white *sahib* had wasted his time. This old woman was a *mihtrani*. Sweeper-caste. Lowest of the low. Better to have left her to the leopards.

After I took a good look at the lady I concluded it would have taken a mighty hungry leopard to eat her. There was nothing much to eat. She was nothing but strips of leather hung together by bone, rail-thin, old and sinugly. Her hair was a wisp and her teeth only a memory in a caved-in mouth. But the eyes in her withered skull were like fanned embers and she found a voice in her corded neck to tell me her right arm was broken. Marveling that the old brown creature hadn't been broken in half by her fall,

I pulled the thorns from my own person and got to work.

A naturalist has to be everything under the sun, including a taxidermist and a doctor. I always carried a medical kit with me; and I managed to set her snapped arm with a splint. My boys looked on in high disdain, spitting copious quids at the path. But the old woman never uttered a groan as I tinkered with her arm, and she got to her feet by herself.

Good Lord! Standing there in the moonlight she was older than ever. Shriveled and skinny, with legs like pipestems and a head like a dried mango, she was nothing but a shadow from the past. Surely the next puff of wind would dust her away.

But the wind came along and she was still there; moreover she spoke, again, to prove reality. She spoke words of difficult hill-dialect, croaking them out through her gums, but I caught them all right, and they gave me a start. For: "Tell me what you want," she said, "and I'll give it to you."

You can imagine I hadn't expected to hear anything like that. If I'd expected anything at all it was a dour word of thanks and to see her pad off down the trail, cursing. "What do you mean?" I asked.

She pointed a crooked finger. "You were going to Lukunpore and thence to find the lost trail," she cawed. "All the white *sahibs* who travel this path look for the lost trail of Suratan Singh. I do not know why, but it is so."

I fumbled with her speech, and then remembered. Of course. Lukunpore was the town where Suratan Singh had started his fadeaway to the mountains. No doubt this old *mihtrani* woman thought I was one of the treasure-hunters seeking the fabulous ruby. I laughed and shook my head, but she gave me a stare from those ember eyes of hers and said something that slapped the wind right out of me.

"If you want the way of the trail," she said, "I will give it to you."

"You mean," I blurted, "you can show me where Suratan took his treasure? You mean—"

"You have been kind to me," the ancient said, and her voice was an echo from a yesterday. "I know where Suratan went because I followed him like the soldiers. I can show you where Suratan lies!"

"Is his treasure still there?" I gasped; and she nodded:

"Do you want to see it?"

WELL, you could have knocked me flat with a pinfeather! Here was this crone, this incredible old witch whom chance had let me save from ruining a leopard's digestion, asking me if I wanted to see the spot where Suratan's treasure lay. As if she could show me the pot of gold at rainbow's end if I'd like her to pull it out of a plug hat. Sort of nonchalant.

I thought of the thousand and one lusty devils who'd fought and scraped and trailed all over hell and died trying to find Suratan Singh's track. Then I let out a hyena's laugh. My hill-boys thought that ancient crone had put a curse on me, and they backed away uneasily.

I guess they were right. I continued laughing, but I laughed a little too long.

That old *mihtrani* witch got a claw on my arm. "The white *sahib* thinks I speak untruth!" she snarled. "Then listen!"

I found myself listening. I couldn't do anything else. I sat on a bowlder at the edge of the path and the old

woman squatted in front of me, telling a story. Her story was hampered because she only had one hand she could gesture with, but she did mighty well, just the same. The moonlight made her a genie; and little, jungle-perfumed winds came whispering out of the sky to tell me she was telling me the truth.

She spoke in a guttural dialect mixed up with a lot of Pushtu and Oriental epigram, some of which I couldn't unravel, but I got the main points of the story, don't forget it.

She told me the story of Suratan's fadeaway with the treasure—the story I'd heard a thousand times before. But my ears stuck out stiff as tin. She had the edge on this legend, all right. She'd been *in* it.

To start with, she told me she was two hundred years old; so I knocked off a hundred years for the sake of accuracy, and then saw she could have been a girl back in 1857 when Suratan hid in that mud house, waiting for the Scotties to finish him.

What do you think? She, herself, had been hiding behind a *peepul* tree, watching the whole affair. She knew Suratan was in the mud house, and she saw the tall Highlanders manufacture their ring of bayonets and start to close in.

That old *mihtrani* woman made me see the thing as she saw it, then. I could see the glint of the bayonets, the set faces of the angry Scots under their high shakoes, the patches of color their kilties made in the elephant grass. I could see Suratan Singh, greasy and fat and panting in terror, crouching behind a slit of window, his eyes on the circle of doom that ringed him in. Lord! That old woman saw the drama in the scene; had me listening with nerves as well as ears. The grim Scotch soldiers closed in like a creeping death.

"And was the nabob all alone in that little mud house?" I asked.

"You ought to know," the old crone rasped. "He was alone in there with his priceless ruby!"

"How big was the ruby?" I wanted to know.

She glared at me as if I'd asked a silly question; then made a five-foot sweep with her twiglike hand. I understood. It was the biggest ruby in the world, no question about it. The old woman chattered something about the extreme beauty of said ruby, launched a spate of fantastic Oriental metaphors likening the ruby to a goddess and a star, uncorked a lot of terms I couldn't catch and ended by letting me understand that Suratan Singh had owned a roomful of treasures and that naturally the one he'd try to take with him in exile would be the best of the lot and a marvel beyond comprehension.

THEN she carried me back to the little mud house, darkness falling, the stalwart Highlanders with their shiny bayonets and death in their eyes getting ready for the final rush. All this the old woman saw as a shivering girl crouching behind a *peepul* tree on the rim of the village.

Believe me, it had made an impression. She described the white soldiers as giants of the most ferocious caste. I could almost feel sorry for the lone Hindu who waited, with his paunch heaving in fright, for the rush to come. But he didn't wait.

The old woman told me she didn't know how he'd got out. But suddenly something scooted past the *peepul* tree where she, the frightened girl, crouched hiding. And she saw in the dark

gloom the figure of the Hindu nabob as he sneaked, unseen by the white soldiers, through the grass. Did he have his treasure with him? You bet he did. My story-teller told me she saw that, too. By the Oath of the Cow, Suratan Singh was not the one to leave his most valued possession behind. He was creeping along as silently as the fall of night from the East, and carrying the treasured ruby with him.

Then she croaked out that she'd left her post at the *peepul* tree and started after the fleeing prince. She'd had to move like anything to keep up with the fugitive, for he'd chosen a path that the devil himself would have hated to follow. Through thorn-brush and brier, across a snake-infested bog, deep into elephant grass.

As if he cared more for his treasure than his life, this Suratan Singh had become agile as the monkey god Hanaman, who'd trod a dangerous bridge of stones to carry a goddess from Ceylon to the mainland. Old Suratan had traveled across a few stones, himself. The girl who followed him saw blood where his torn feet had stepped.

When she got to this point in her story, the old woman creaked to her feet. "But perhaps the white *sahib* is tired," she cackled. "Mayhap you wish to hear no more. Are you still interested?"

Interested! I was seeing a Hindu dash along through the brush, clutching a gem that twinkled rays of fire, a jewel beyond value and big as a house. You bet I was interested!

"Keep talking," I ordered, hoarse-voiced. "This Hindu with his treasure. Where did he go?"

A laugh crackled out of the woman's toothless mouth, and she pointed into the ravine from which I'd rescued her not half an hour before.

"He ran along the bottom of that gully," she wheezed. "If you desire it, we can follow his trail from there."

We followed his trail from there.

THE woman found a path crawling to the ravine's bottom, and I followed as if I were mesmerized. I'm not too certain I wasn't. The legend of Suratan Singh had been percolating in my blood for a long time, and it only needed a little jolt to set me off. And this old woman's story was no little jolt.

She was handing me the key to a puzzle that had harried the wiliest of Asia's treasure-hunters for eighty-odd years, and I must have gone a little light-headed. For I forgot my mission for the museum, slung my rifle under arm and started after that gossiping hag.

That ruby must have mesmerized old Suratan, too. He surely picked himself one hell of a route. We thrashed down the ravine bottom, and the thorns began to stick like darts from my arms, legs, palms, and posterior. We advanced down a dried-up watercourse where the pebbles were sharp as knives.

The moonlight dropped shadows to betray my feet, and I stumbled like a drunkard. In half an hour I was gasping, sweat-wet, bleeding from a million scratches. But I was going to the spot where the great jewel lay. The ancient crone padded along in front of me, grimacing, grinning, beckoning — a rawhide marionette.

Quiet? This was the place where echoes came to die. Only the sound of stones set scampering by our heels, the occasional yelp of a jackal, the whisper of hot wind through leaves, disturbed that Asian stillness that casts a spell. Before I knew it the moon had

gone. Some time later the stars winked out and a dash of flame leaped across the East.

Now we were burrowing into deep hills, and I could see the tops of tall cliffs stabbing skyward out of jungle green. Hot, chrome-yellow dawn gave promise of a scorching day, found me limping in rags through a bamboo grove, and brought a semblance of sanity to my addled brain.

"What a fool I am," I thought when I knelt beside a pool for a drink and sighted what had been my face written over with scratches, black with grime, bubbling sweat. I yelled at the woman: "How much farther?"

"Not far!" she answered, and the vision of a ruby that glowed like a planet seduced reason, and I plunged on after the witch. I've hit some mighty evil country in my day, but I never saw a stretch to equal the *terai* we crossed that morning. Never!

Thorns, briers, nettles weren't the half of it. Open ground was peppered with tiny stones, adze-sharp. There were bogs of mud like black glue. Jungles where the vines hung in loops from the palm trees and slapped at your eyes. Swamps clouded with malarial steam, seeping and stinking, breeding grounds for those little *krait* snakes that are deadly as bullets from a Lüger. And overhead a blazing, withering sun that hit like a fist on your neck.

I TELL you, the thought of that ruby was the only thing to keep me on my feet. Every time I'd start to grumble, every time I'd stop to rest, the old woman leading me would remind me of the story. As I fought up the trail she chattered.

She made me see that terrified, two-thirds-dead Hindu nabob humping along for dear life, carrying his ruby. She made me see the grim-faced white troopers hounding the fleeing Hindu's heels.

I could fathom the fright of that hounded wretch. After all, he wasn't just a pot-bellied native prince. He was a human being. How his mouth must have yawped with fear every time he heard the soldiers behind him. How his bones must have been racked.

I could appreciate that. My own bones were getting some racking. The heat on my back was roasting, too, and the sun hadn't been any less hot that July of 1857.

The crone was tough. You have to be tough to grow old in North India. And she was a native and used to those hills. I was not. I don't suppose Suratan Singh was, either. The old woman in front of me halted to throw a stick at a green snake.

"Suratan went through those trees," she pointed out. "I remember the banyan yonder. There was blood where he had walked. And all the time he carried his treasure, so."

She crooked her good arm and wiggled the bones making fingers for her hand, and I wondered if Suratan had run along holding his jewel in front of him, watching its fire-colored blaze, holding it there to keep courage. It must have taken something more than mere fear of death to shove the man over this plague-spot. The old woman said so, too.

"For the prince it was terrible," the hag croaked out. "The white giants were after him with gleaming knives at the ends of their guns. They wore boots. Suratan was bare of foot. He had no time to stop and rest the way they did. *Ahee!* He must run, run, run. He must fly to save his precious ruby. The white men followed like the evil spirits of Shaitan. Sometimes they

were close. They would see him. They would shoot—"

Bang! This story was getting realistic as the devil. No sooner had the old hag uttered the word "shoot," than a gunshot smashed through the jungle. My helmet spun from my head with a hole drilled through its crown!

MY nose-dive for cover was a fast one, I can promise you. I didn't need a little bird to tell me what had happened. Those coolies of mine. That tall guide with the flower behind his ear. They'd overheard the crone's treasure-tale. They'd been awed at first, then talked it over among themselves. If the white *sahib* thought this ruby was worth finding, there must be something in it. There were rifles in my luggage. They'd armed themselves, and started after me.

In the bamboo grove I'd left a moment before, another gun cracked. A bullet whined past my ear to ricochet from a tree with a *ping*. I screamed at the old woman, telling her to duck; and then let fly a fusillade at the bamboos.

My own fire was answered by a lively hail of pellets that stung overhead and pruned a lot of orchid leaves. The whole ten of those coolies must have let fly. Here was a situation to tickle my scalp.

"We've got to get out of here!" I bawled at the old woman. "Where can we go?"

The gums worked in the hag's shrunken mouth. "We must follow the trail taken by Suratan," she snarled. "It is the only way of escape for you. You cannot go back from here."

"Get on, then!" I yelled; and we got. I had something besides the thought of a ruby to keep me moving now. You bet I had! I scrabbled after that old woman, tearing through the underbrush; and ten coolies, bent on stopping me, came after. Every half mile or so I'd stop to slip a load of cartridges into my Mannlicher rifle and spray bullets at the brush behind me. My pursuers would uncork a shot or two to let me know they were still there; and I'd gather my tired bones together and run some more.

Listen! All that blatant, furnace-hot afternoon and throughout the next hot night I plugged up that wilderness trail, led by that incredible witch-woman and followed by that bloodthirsty gang.

Maybe you think the sardonic aspect of the thing wasn't brought home to me! Here I was, following that trail broken by Suratan Singh. I'd changed places with the Hindu. He'd been hounded by a squad of Scotch Highlanders. I was dogged by a crowd of ruffian natives. Man, I was fit to be tied.

We gave the natives the slip about dawn, and just as the sun was stoking the sky for a second day of record heat I staggered into a forest of *mohors* where the mud was knee-deep and the temperature so stifling that the fetid air seemed to sizzle. The swampy forest-bottom smoked. The slime seemed to simmer for all the world like a caldron of pitch.

Perhaps you think that hundred-year-old hag was tuckered out? She was not. You could hear her hide squeaking as she rocked along, but I think she could have marched forever. Her nerves and feelings had been worn out long ago. I think her insides were sawdust. How can you tire out sawdust?

But my insides weren't sawdust, by a long shot. My eyes were baked mar-

bles in my head. My tongue was a chunk of burned cake. My throat was a red string. I'd had nothing to eat save a few raw berries; nothing at all to drink for five hours. My hands and feet were swollen and cut, my neck blistered; the thorns stuck out of my hide like bristles on a porcupine. And any minute a lead slug might drone from behind to crack me in the spine or through the heart.

"Courage!" my tireless guide adjured. "Did not Suratan follow this very path? And remember: he carried his treasure."

Regardless of scorpions, I plopped myself down on a rotting log, and fanned what was left of my face with what was left of my helmet. I panted and winked sweat from my eyes and glared at the woman.

"To hell with Suratan and his treasure!" I snarled. "I can't take another damned step!"

"Those who follow you will find you here," she suggested cheeringly.

"I can't take another damned step!" I repeated.

Her wrinkled face cackled a chuckle, and she pointed a hooking thumb. "Five steps more will carry you out of these trees," she said. "The end of Suratan's trail is there."

I took those five steps on the bound. Then I stopped in my tracks with a yell.

IN this day and age of superlatives and airplanes, a thousand feet up sounds ordinary. But don't you believe it. Stand on the pavement in front of the Woolworth Building in New York and tilt your head. It doesn't shaft skyward a thousand feet, but it seems to climb up to the moon.

Then fancy my feelings when I slogged out of the trees and found myself standing on the edge of a grassy acre of ground backed by a cliff wall that shot to the clouds. Wow!

The *terai* jungle came to a dead stop in front of that wall. The ground made a thousand-foot leap at one jump and became the Himalaya Mountains.

A giant scimitar had hacked off the slope of the Himalayas to make room for more lowland beneath. Or else that cliff was a stone wall reared on the rim of the world. I stared up that wall, and the eyes swelled big in my head. My vision swam. Whew! That wall towered sheer, like the side of a building—one vast, blank sweep shooting up and up, smooth as glass, and stopping only when it touched the blue.

Feathery puffs of cloud clustered at the cliff-top. The early morning sunshine shafted across its bleak face. High in the air an eagle wheeled; so high it was small as a gnat. And that was only halfway up the incredible cliff. Say, it gave me the creeps.

I stood glaring up that mighty escarpment of stone, open-mouthed. You know the feeling it gives you to see something unexpected and vast. Awe and dizziness and a queer desire to yawn. Empathy, the psychologists call it. Right then I was suffering a double dose of empathy.

Then I remembered something, and I jumped about with a growl. It wouldn't do for me to stand yawping when the jungle behind me was hiding the advance of a thug-gang after my scalp.

"This is the end of the trail!" I yelled at the old woman. "Where is the treasure of Suratan? Where do we go from here?"

The rag, bone and hair-hank got a finger into the air. "Up!"

"*Up!*" I snarled. "What the devil do you mean?"

"It is the only way you can go,"

she cackled. "The hill-men come along the trail back there. It was even so with Suratan, who ran from the white giants with the knives."

Her words went through my brain like a hot wire. I saw what I'd done. I'd chased up the bottom of a valley and was caught at its end like a cat at the end of a blind alley. Trapped as nicely as you please. I was mad, I can tell you. I gave that witch a glance that should have knocked off her head.

"You old fool!" I squalled, thinking of the ten coolie gunmen cutting off my escape. "You've got us caught now! Caught like rats!" The sweat stood out on my forehead. "Any minute those jackals will pop out of these trees. Ten to one. You—"

She gestured. "It was even so with Suratan. Any minute the white tigers would be out of the trees. Only three of them trailed him; but he had no gun. Look! One of the white soldiers did come out of the trees." She pointed at the moss under her feet.

Hot-eyed I stared. There, embedded in the ground, rotted to dust, lay the stock of a musket and the crumbling remains of a rusted gunbarrel.

"See!" croaked the crone. "The white soldier reached here. But he did not catch Suratan. Suratan went *up!*"

She pointed again at that sheer shot of cliff.

"You mean," I shouted, "that Suratan climbed that wall?"

"To the top," she growled, wagging her head. "And you must climb it, too, if you would find the treasure of Suratan and escape your enemies. Remember, *sahib,* how tired he was. Remember, he carried his treasured ruby with him. But the white soldiers were close behind. He climbed. Look!" She slipped past me and went to the base of the cliff. "See—there are steps. Cut in the stone by the gods."

NOT till then did I notice a succession of little niches gouged out of the stone and laddering a straight line up that cliff-side. Mere hand-holds, they were, affording about as much grip for fingers and toes as would bricks jutting three inches from the face of a smooth brick wall. Lord alone knows how those niches had been made. Perhaps by Dravidian priests lowered from the cliff-top in rope slings with chisel and maul to peck out the most horrible stairway in the universe.

Those niches were so small you could not see them forty feet above ground unless you looked hard. As for climbing by them—no wonder the thousand and one treasure-hunters who'd sought Suratan hadn't come to the end of his trail.

"You say he went up this cliff!" I whispered. I had to whisper from the very thought of it.

"He climbed the steps," answered the old woman, "carrying his treasured ruby. So." She made a pantomime I couldn't understand. "And he was not fifty hands high on the wall before the white soldier ran from the trees and saw him. I was over there, hiding in the rhododendron, and I saw it all. The white giant lifted his gun and started to shoot. Suratan kept climbing. The bullets struck the wall near his hands. I could see the chips fly from the stone where they struck. Think!"

I thought of it, and it made the sweat wash down into my mouth. That wretch of a Hindu scrambling up the face of that cliff, clinging to a ladder no fireman or human fly would dare to look at. The Scotch High-

lander darting from the jungle, standing on the very fan of ground where I now stood, pot-shooting at that fat and gasping Hindu crawling up the wall.

It made my jaw rattle. The old crone told how the Scotchman fired again and again. Don't blame that soldier. He'd gone through hell to catch this Hindu prince. Those days of the Mutiny were terrible days. Neither side would give quarter.

"The white giant's weapon spoke many times, but Suratan climbed on. At last the white man fell exhausted and sick. He had taken the fever as he crossed the *terai* after Suratan, and from where I hid I could see death in his eye. But he lay there on the ground and his gun continued to speak. *Ahee!*"

What a monumental struggle that was! The dying Scot fighting with his last breath. That bedeviled Hindu working a miracle to save himself—and his treasure, as the old woman kept repeating. Lordy!

I could see that Scotch soldier with fever-madness in his eye; see that Hindu's figure growing smaller and smaller as it scaled that fearful height. The Scotty lay on the ground and sniped. He wasn't going to let that nabob escape. He'd seen white women butchered by these Hindus. He wanted with all the furious and terrible will of the Scot to work a just retribution.

"But Suratan reached the top!" the woman chanted. "And he lies there with his treasure to this day. I know. And if the white *sahib* would find this place where Suratan lies, if the white *sahib* would save his own life, he must climb as Suratan climbed before him."

I was trembling in every limb. "I can't!" I groaned. "I can't!" And suddenly I was at that terrible wall, starting up hand over hand.

IN New York during the war I saw a man go up the front of a skyscraper to advertise Liberty Bonds. He'd stop every ten feet or so, look down, yell his jeremiad at the crowd, and the crowd would roar. My start up that dizzy cliff was somewhat similar. I could just get my fingers into those niches and kick for a toe-hold. Then with a terrific effort of will I could worm one toe into the next niche up, fling a hand to catch at another of those shallow notchings in the wall-face, and, hugging the stone, yank myself another lap skyward. Then, with the breath steaming from my clenched teeth, the sweat leaking into my eyes, I'd glance down and yell—I don't know why.

There was no crowd below to spur me on—at first. There was only that old *mihtrani* hag. Every time I'd look down in terror she'd point at the sky and remind me that Suratan had made the grade. Then she'd laugh.

That laugh! It rivaled the cackle of a peacock; but it burned into my aching head as the call of Circe must have scorched the ears of the luckless Greek sailors. It made me bite my lips and close my eyes and think of the fabulous fortune at cliff-top and *climb*. It moved me up that wall.

Can you see that picture of me clinging to that shot of blank stone? Inching my way to its top like a fly on a windowpane—but wearing no gauze wings on which to float away should my fingers miss the clutch or my foot make a slip. Lordy! My feet *did* slip. A hundred times. Then I'd hang by bleeding finger-tips and kick till I'd find the notch. Then I'd plaster myself against that wall and wait trembling

while the sweat simmered out of my pores.

I was a hundred feet in the air when I noticed tiny gougings from the stone near my hand-niches. Wow! Those were the places the Scotch soldier's bullets had struck as he tried to bring down the fat Hindu. I began to appreciate that Hindu nabob. I was inspired to achieve a height of two hundred feet. Thank God no one was sniping at me.

Spang! I'd thought of the devil; now I heard his sweet voice. The gunfire sounded like a hammer-tap below me, and splinters flew from the wall above. I made the mistake of looking down. In the clearing below the old woman was not to be seen. But black heads and brown shoulders were there, and I caught the bright sheen of gunmetal. The metal spat flame as half a dozen shots barked, and the splinters scattered down on my sweat-plastered hair.

I went up that wall all right, then. Believe you me, that was life's darkest hour. I clawed and kicked and yanked myself up. My arms wanted to tear from their shoulder-sockets. My hands and knees were raw as open wounds. My throat knotted in my neck. My spine was an icicle.

Every inch of the climb was contested by steel slugs that smacked all around me like buckshot. The bullets struck with a *whing* and ricocheted with a whistle. Chips of stone cut at my cheeks. One shot ripped a rag from my sleeve, and I couldn't help glancing at that piece of cloth circling down and down and down . . .

I climbed. Brain, heart, and soul went dead. My nerves expired. I was an automatic thing, moving by reflexes. A thing that clawed for a handhold, kicked for a foothold, battled against the law of gravity, and hauled itself upward toward the sky. The bullets stung around me, but I didn't care. Lord knows why I hung on and kept going.

That cliff was high! Higher than the Woolworth Building. The wall below me sped downward like the wall of an elevator shaft. The men on the ground below were ants. The air in which I was suspended was thin. I was five hundred feet above ground, ready to plunge into eternity, unable to let go. It makes me sick to think about it. It turns my stomach to this day.

THE theologians are wrong. I know. The way to hell is not down; it is up. It goes up to a height even bullets can scarcely attain, and the top of this dizzy road overhangs so that the creature who reaches that awful peak must clutch and claw and kick himself over a cornice of stone before he can stand on his feet beneath the clouds.

You understand? The top of that cliff bulged like a forehead, and I had to climb up over this bulge by means of those shallow niches in the solid rock. I brayed when I saw that bulge. Perhaps I prayed.

At any rate, I seem to have rounded the thing, somehow. Like a bug rounding the under side of an orange, I imagine. I know Newton would never have believed his law if he'd seen me do it—had he seen me clawing and hanging and scraping and dragging my flagellated, nerveless carcass up over that lofty cliff-rim.

I was over! I'd reached the top! I was lying horizontal on my belly, scrabbling on a flat surface, fainting, mouthing, wriggling lizard-like to get away from the edge of that awful precipice. I was spraddling on a bald

plateau that sloped away under the clouds and fell with a gentle declivity to the edge of a dark green forest. I clutched at the ground to keep from falling off that level stretch!

Somewhere distant a temple bell was tolling. There would be a town—a road—people! I laughed, and the sound of my voice was that of a saw on dull wood, raspy in the thin clear air.

Then I was stiff on my hands and knees, staring. Staring wide-eyed at a skeleton of white bones that lay on the patch of rock before me. There on the rim of that cliff lay those bones, and I crawled to them with my tongue out. That skeleton lay staring at the sky, grinning in the same sunshine that found a glint of metal under its breast-bone. My eyes hung out of my head. Sticking there in the framework of that skeleton's ribs was a long, thin, double-edged knife. I whispered: "Suratan Singh!"

Then I yelped. Beside this first frame of bones lay another, a smaller skeleton! You understand? A second skeleton!

It sprawled, face down on the rock, and I saw with astonishment that the wrist-bones of its left arm were encircled by a little silver bracelet! Then I saw something else—something that dropped me to my face with a sob. The base of this second skeleton's skull was punctured by a small round hole; and the skeleton was that of a woman!

BRADSHAW was pounding his fist on his knee, and his voice had begun to shake.

"You get it, man? You see it? There were two skeletons up there! Two! Suratan Singh had carried a woman with him when he left his little mud hut to make his get-away from the British. All the way through that awful *terai* he'd carried her!

"Think of that fat, heathen Hindu doing that! The old hag who led me over his trail had tried to explain that. But her unfamiliar dialect and her flowery metaphors had gone over my head. I hadn't comprehended her gestures.

"The Hindu, though, chased by those Highlanders, had carried a girl in his arms all the way to that cliff. Then, think! He'd slung her on his back somehow and carried her up that horrible precipice wall! Lordy! While the lone soldier who'd managed to trail him stood below and blazed away with his rifle.

"That soldier was out of his head from fever and sun, but his bullets hit close. Too close. One of them struck that girl in the back of her head. The poor devil of a Hindu kept climbing; he didn't know she was dead. Torn to pieces by the jungle, tired enough to die, he climbed that awful wall with a girl on his back; reached the top.

"Can you see that poor devil, then? Just ahead lay the way to freedom—a forest, a road—the road I took to reach Nani Tal. All the way to Nani Tal I thought of that Hindu, and I was sick. He'd beaten his way up that wall, only to find the girl dead when he gained the top. I could see him bending over that poor slain creature, with all the hell of the universe in his eyes. Then he pointed his knife at his heart—"

The naturalist mopped at his face. His cheeks were drawn, gray in the evening dusk. Presently he resumed the narrative.

"That's the point of my story, man! Suratan Singh hadn't wrought that frightful road of escape for the saving

of any mere gem. He'd forged the bravest gesture in the world, and he'd done it for love. Far as I'm concerned, he's expiated all the sins of India's benighted race; bought honor for all the men of the world! You'd know, if you'd scaled that precipice. If India still breeds her sons like that, she'll never sit back to be ruled."

"But the treasure!" I demanded stupidly. "The famous ruby—?"

Bradshaw shook his head. "There's no word for 'the' in the Hindustani language, or the written Hindee. That is what fooled the legend-makers who read Suratan's note to his brother. That's what misled me in the old crone's description of Suratan's flight. In each case no mention was made of *a* treasure or *the* gem. There are no articles in Hindustani, remember. Suratan had written: 'I carry with me my most precious treasure—my most precious ruby.' We who hunted him supplied the 'a' and 'the.' In this case we were mistaken. Look."

The naturalist groped, and drew from his pocket a little hoop of silver. "That's the bracelet I found on her wrist."

He handed the bracelet to me. On the under side of the band were engraved these Hindee characters:

लाल

"The word is *la'l*, isn't it?" I said wonderingly. "Why, that means—"

"That's right," Bradshaw sighed. "Her name—Ruby."

THE END

When the Chinese Advertise

IN Shanghai and Hongkong are some excellent examples of the Chinese idea of advertising and the use he makes of signs. On any of the streets which lead from Nanking Road or the Bund in Shanghai toward the native stores one walks under hundreds of long, heavily lettered signs. Like the Chinese newspapers, signs must be read up and down instead of crosswise as we read. So the Chinese merchant plasters clumsy red Chinese characters on a strip of white cloth about the width of a stair carpet and hangs it out above the street where the occupants of passing rickshaws will be certain to get a glimpse of it.

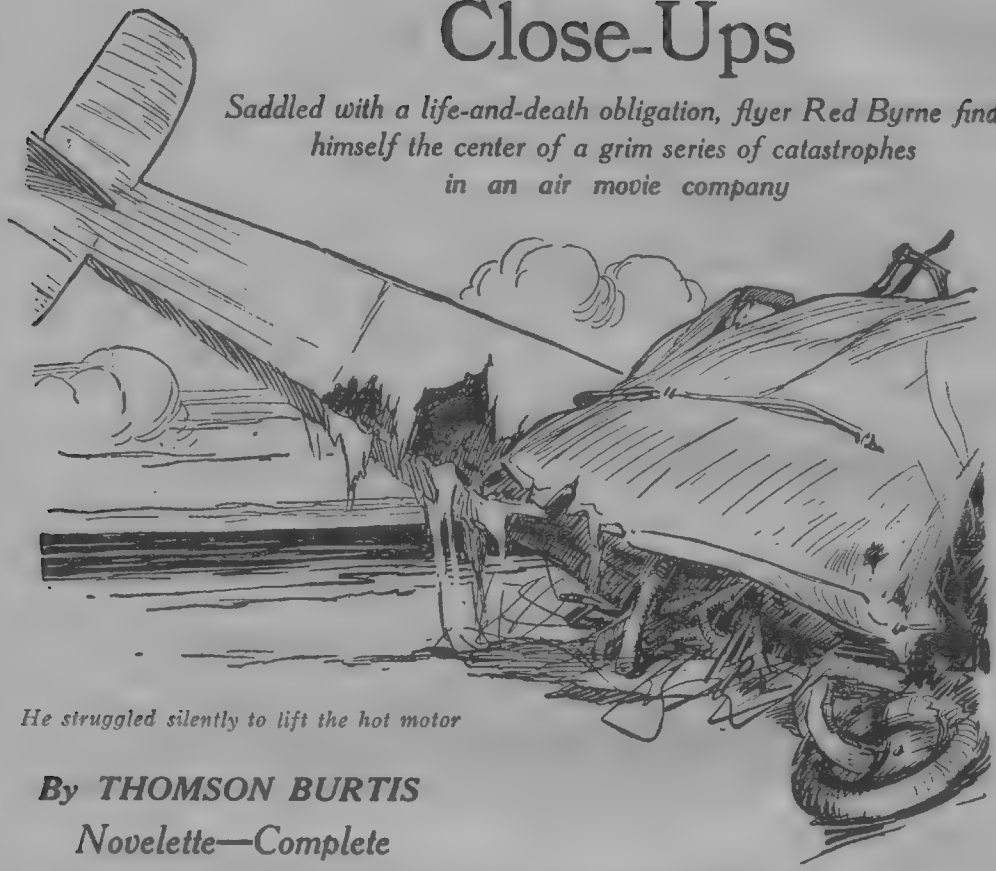
When a merchant in China has a sale he has one of his clerks stand out in front of his shop and chant songs about it. That merchant whose clerk can sing the loudest will, of course, attract the attention of the greatest number and his sale will be proportionately successful.

Many of the signs used by Chinese merchants who cater to the trade of the white man are exceptionally amusing. Near Queen's Road in Hongkong, for example, there is a tailor shop with a Chinese proprietor. To let the world know what an exceptional tailor he is and how ultra-modern are the clothes he makes this proprietor, one Ah Men, has placed this sign across the front of his shop: "The Last Word in Tailoring—Ah Men."

Raymond A. Wohlrabe.

Close-Ups

Saddled with a life-and-death obligation, flyer Red Byrne finds himself the center of a grim series of catastrophes in an air movie company



He struggled silently to lift the hot motor

By THOMSON BURTIS

Novelette—Complete

CHAPTER I.

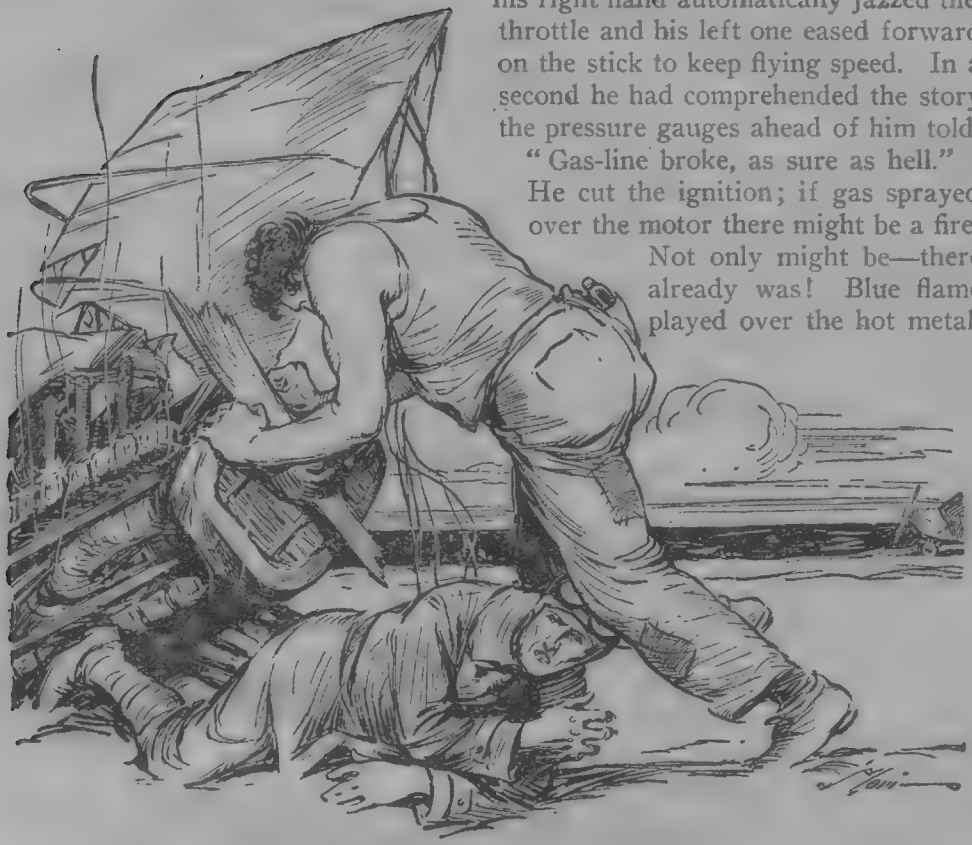
HOT METAL.

TERRENCE BYRNE, usually known as Red, tried not to permit himself to be affected by the lowering clouds or the keen wind which blew off the Pacific as he sent his monoplane up the California coast.

It was a dull, depressing day; cockiness was one of Red's most cherished assets, and to be otherwise seemed to argue a lack of confidence in himself. And if life hadn't been treating him so bountifully, of late, as a stunt man in Hollywood, that was no reason for ex-Lieutenant Terrence Byrne of the Army Air Service to have misgivings because he had left the service flat.

Wisps of fog proceeded to make flying a little more difficult as he crossed the halfway mark between San Diego and Los Angeles. His eight cylinder motor was roaring along with even rhythm, however, and the trim little two-seated Bryan monoplane which represented practically his entire earthly fortune forged its way steadily up the winding coast line. He did not look behind him, and consequently had no knowledge of the fact that another plane, somewhat lower than he was, was following him a mile or so back.

He was a little more than three thousand feet high, and as he hunched down in his cockpit to escape the penetrating cold of the air stream he was thinking.



his right hand automatically jazzed the throttle and his left one eased forward on the stick to keep flying speed. In a second he had comprehended the story the pressure gauges ahead of him told.

"Gas-line broke, as sure as hell."

He cut the ignition; if gas sprayed over the motor there might be a fire. Not only might be—there already was! Blue flame played over the hot metal,

"Well, another day another dollar. I'd better not miss many more, at that!"

He had flown to San Diego for the purpose of cracking up a plane on Rockwell Field for Mammoth Pictures, Inc., thereby adding to the thrill of the flying sequence in the picture they were making and adding five hundred dollars to his emaciated bank account.

It was the first job he'd had in weeks . . .

His big body snapped upright, and suddenly every muscle was taut. The motor ahead of him coughed, sputtered, and then died with an expiring sigh.

His blue-gray eyes danced over the instrument board in a split second, as and now Red Byrne was metamorphosed into the aërial wild cat whom an emergency always transformed completely.

He had thrown the Bryan into a steep bank, and the next instant was sideslipping down toward the deserted beach. That would blow the flames upward toward the right wing, and keep the heat and smoke from being blown back on him. Clouds of smoke marked the trail of the slipping monoplane as he sent it hurtling downward, his foot clamped on the rudder bar.

The lean young pilot was like a grim-faced statue as he held his ship in a slip so steep that the air stream almost blew his goggles from his eyes and tore the breath from his nostrils. He had scarcely noticed the terrain

below him, though he knew that he was over the beach. The fledgling fire, he thought, had been blown out by now, but nevertheless he continued sideslipping as he cursed his luck.

"Stranded for the night probably, and it'll cost me a hundred bucks before I get back to Hollywood!" he thought furiously.

Somehow Fate seemed to have a faculty of kicking a man when he was down.

The ground was rushing up to meet him now, barely a thousand feet below. The fire was out, so he leveled off as he studied the beach with rising trepidation.

This was barely a hundred feet wide, and it was now high tide. The only stretches of uncovered sand were rough and soft. At low tide he'd have had ample space on sand packed down by the water. From the edge of the sand, stretching inland, there was nothing but woods. He must land on the soft beach with his dead motor, and the odds were badly against his plane.

HE kept his mind off the possibility of the ship's destruction. What that would mean to the fortunes of Red Byrne was not a pleasant subject for rumination. Instead, he concentrated on the landing ahead and settled down to fly with all the skill that ten solid years of flying had given him.

Bit by bit he eased the Bryan down, angling into the stiff wind which blew off the heaving Pacific. He came down crabwise, pointed in a general northerly direction, and as he conserved flying speed automatically his eyes studied the sand ahead of him. Soft and pitted and narrow, such was the beach.

His eyes were wide but unafraid behind his goggles as the plane swooped earthward and leveled off, still crabbed into the wind, two feet above the sand. The motor, still extremely hot, sent blasts of warm air back at him, blown by the idly whirling propeller.

"Better not have much of a wreck with this gasoline-soaked crate," was the grim thought that shot through his mind as he started to ease back on the stick.

Angled into the wind, his ground speed was scarcely forty miles an hour as the nose came up slightly for the landing. Then, almost before it happened, his flyer's instinct sensed what was about to come. The wind increased suddenly, and a powerful blast lifted his left wing high in the air. He shoved forward on the stick as it happened, but he was a little too late.

The Bryan struck the soft sand, right wing down. An instant later the motor dug in. The ship described a fast cartwheel, bouncing a little as it did so. It came down again, half on its tail. The fuselage crumpled with a sickening noise of tearing linen and rasping metal and singing wires. The motor, momentarily, was almost directly above him.

His dazed mind could not comprehend all the things that were happening at once. The fuselage, directly below his cockpit, seemed to break in half. His cockpit and the motor, comprising the front portion of the ship, seemed to be snapped forward all at once. His head struck the jutting compass on the instrument board, and life was nightmare for a second as he fought for consciousness.

He felt himself, in a vague way, hit the ground, and it seemed to him that it was very, very warm. Dizzy and weak, in a species of delirium, he began to fight and claw at a heap of wreckage

which was twined all about him. Yet something seemed to keep him helpless. It was like one of those horrible dreams where he was paralyzed in the face of deadly danger.

Slowly the mists cleared from his mind. For an instant he gazed stupidly at the débris which blinded him. He was lying on his side, his head throbbing sickeningly, the center of a mass of twisted wire and splintered wood and torn linen.

"Fire!" was the alarm that rang through his mind, and he started to crawl out of the wreck. He was dimly aware of a sort of drone overhead, but as the full meaning of his dilemma swept over him, he forgot that.

He could not move his right foot. His leg was being burned as by a hot iron, the pain increasing every second.

Now he saw why. His leg was pinned down by the motor, which was pressing it deeply into the sand. The motor, still extremely hot, was angled toward him, the lowest cylinders dug into the sand above his pinioned leg.

His anguished eyes widened with horror as he saw what his frantic movements had done.

Very, very slowly, the motor was teetering toward his body, gradually losing balance and preparing to fall over directly on him. Each passing second increased the pain in his leg as the hundreds of pounds of hot metal dug in deeper and the pressure became more intense. It was like some Gargantuan flatiron, hot off a giant stove, descending to destroy him with a slowness which was the acme of torture.

HE was as helpless as a hog on a spit. His leg was about paralyzed now. He could barely move. The universe was a hell of pain, and death would have been a gift from the gods to save him the anguish of that motor on top of him.

He was almost beyond thought or feeling, and as a shout reached his ears he thought it was a part of his delirium. His eyes, fascinated by the sheer horror of it, were frozen to the slowly tilting motor. In a few seconds it would fall squarely on him.

"God!"

It was an actual shout that he heard, and Byrne turned his pale, sweat-beaded face toward it. A hairy giant of a man was leaping forward. It seemed that he took in every detail of the situation, and all its desperation, in a split second. Byrne was holding his breath for the last drop of the motor when the stranger straddled him, and without hesitation put both hands against that heap of steaming iron.

Suddenly it seemed to Byrne that he was a spirit disembodied, and he watched his would-be rescuer with impersonal curiosity. His brain could feel no more. He saw muscles ripple below the man's sweat-soaked undershirt—he wore no shirt—and heard a few groans escape him as he heaved against the motor, his feet dug deep into the yielding sand.

For an instant it was like a silent struggle between giants. There was not a move or a word, except those strangled groans. Was that the odor of burning flesh that came to Byrne's nostrils? Of course—the man's hands on the motor.

An instant of exquisite pain as the motor dug deeper into Red's leg, just above the ankle, and the stranger pushed it upright.

"Jerk your leg out—now!"

It was a sort of strangled sob from overwrought lungs and tortured nerves. At "now" Byrne tried his

leg. It moved! The stranger had lifted the motor for an instant, and he was free.

For the moment Byrne was weak and sick. Every muscle in his body had gone limp, and he could not even think. Then the shirtless stranger turned around, inspecting his hands with his mouth twisted into a grin across a face that was white.

"Looks as though you'll have to fly us home," the newcomer stated. "Some lunch-hooks, eh?"

They were like a pair of toasted hams.

"How's your leg?" the stranger went on, his large black eyes shifting to the limb in question.

Somehow Red could find nothing to say. He was possessed of a vast reserve, always, and it had never been easy for him to indicate his real feelings. Possibly that was because he had been a lone wolf so long.

So, without a word, he moved his leg cautiously. Pain stabbed through it to his thigh, but he felt it impersonally.

"Doesn't seem to be a break," he drawled.

Methodically he staggered to his feet, supporting his weight on his good leg, and then slowly transferred a portion of it to the injured member.

"I can walk," he said finally, and proved it by taking a painful step or two.

"A considerable list to starboard, but still able to navigate," the stranger grinned through white lips. "Let's have a drink. Get it out of my pocket, will you?"

Byrne obediently got the pint bottle out of the pilot's rear pocket, noticing as he did so that the khaki breeches were patched in two places. His eyes rested briefly on a dilapidated ship, still idling, which stood fifty yards up the beach.

"Hold it to my mouth, will you?"

He took a drink which made Byrne's eyes open wide, and in the interval during which the liquor was gurgling down the stranger's throat he had a chance to observe him closely for the first time.

THE man was as tall as Red himself was, but must have weighed at least forty pounds more. Where Red was lean, sloping of shoulders and narrowed-hipped, the other airman had a barrel-like torso set on long, powerfully built legs. His shoulders were wide and square, and from them emerged a rather thick neck which added to the impression of power which Red knew so well was in that superb body.

His face was square, and handsome in a rugged sort of way, despite the fact that it was grimy with oil and that he needed a shave badly. His thick, coarse black hair was of the type that refused to lie down, and now it had been whipped by the wind into a tangled thicket.

Deep lines ran from his wide nostrils to the edges of his mouth, and there was an indescribably devil-may-care quality about the ragged stranger which was apparent in every word and action. Regardless of the fact that he was dirty and unshaven, half clothed in garments that had seen their best days, there was something debonair and carelessly self-confident in the man.

As he took his lips from the bottle, his eyes smiled into the blue-gray ones of the man whose life he had saved.

"Do you good," he stated.

Red hesitated. Then, in that creamy Mississippi drawl which was his heritage, he said awkwardly:

"I'm no hand to spill over. But I reckon you know what I mean, suh, when I say thank you and I hope I can do as much for you some day."

"I don't! Some other kind of favor, O. K.! But not that!"

Red smiled his slow smile. He had forgotten his throbbing head and paining leg as he gestured with the bottle toward the stranger.

"Happy landings," Byrne toasted, and drank deep of the *tequila*.

As though the drink had snapped him out of the unreal world in which he had been living for the past fifteen minutes, Red said seriously:

"You've got to get to a doctor. Will your crate carry two?"

"Sure, if she holds together. She's got a 220 Hisso in her."

They started plowing through the sand, and Red said slowly:

"By the way, my name's Byrne."

"Mine's McKay—Mickey McKay. You're not from Hollywood by any chance, are you?"

"Uh-huh. Trying to crash the movies."

"Great!"

McKay was grinning, although Red knew that he must be in great pain, and his strong white teeth contrasted startlingly with his grimy face.

"Why so? It's not so hot from my point of view."

"Because that's where I'm bound and you can show me the ropes. Mister, I'm going to trade on what I did for you, and how!"

"That's O. K. by me," said Red quietly.

"FIRST of all," went on the other, surprisingly, "I intend to move in on you and become your star boarder, free gratis, until such time as these mitts heal and you land a job for the both of us. I am, my lad, penniless, and I am sure you wouldn't want to see me sleeping on the park benches. By the way, what prospects for a job have you got?"

"Pretty good," said Byrne. "In about a week I expect a call from a fellow who is starting up a new company to make flying pictures. Six months ago he didn't have a dime, but he has raised a lot of coin somewhere and is going in on a big scale. He and I don't get along very well, but he knows I can fly and I need the work. His name is Rufe Gorham."

"Rufe Gorham? I'll be damned. Was he ever in the Army?"

"Uh-huh. I was his first instructor," Red stated.

"And he was mine, the scum!"

There was an instant of surprised silence. Red had imagined that McKay had been an Army flyer at some time, but this was the first word that he had let drop concerning it.

"Saying which kind words, he took another sniff of his soda water," McKay went on, suiting the action to the word. "Of all the loud-mouthed, dictatorial, lousy fatheads who ever made a kaydet's life miserable, he was the worst."

"No doubt about that, and I wouldn't be surprised," Red said slowly. "I can't quite figure him, at that. In general, I don't like him."

"You and me both," said McKay.

CHAPTER II.

THREATS.

IT was just exactly a week later that Red, his leg sore but usable, spiraled his plane down over the Mohave Desert and landed near what seemed the encampment of a small army. It

was really Rufus Gorham Productions, Inc., on location.

In his bungalow he had left Mr. Mickey McKay, where that gentleman had made himself very much at home for the past seven days. Red's eyes darkened as he thought of certain distasteful features of that enforced visit. He was a man who made few friends and enjoyed his solitude. And yet—he thought of the red-hot motor and the seared hands. A debt was a debt.

A mechanic who came out to take care of Red's ship pointed the way to the shack which was the office of Rufe Gorham.

"Hello, Terry-werry!" boomed a voice which would have made the Bull of Bashan sound like a canary. "For crying out loud, where've you been? Sit down."

As usual, Gorham had started by rubbing Red exactly the wrong way. The squat ex-flyer had a habit of calling people by alliterative nicknames, such as Harry-warry and Freddy-eddy, and not unnaturally it galled Byrne. So did Gorham's assertive voice and dogmatic manner and his habit of laying down the law on all occasions. His stock phrases, used at least ten times each in any conversation, didn't give Red any appetite either.

"Right on the ground yourself, I see," Red drawled easily as he walked into the shack.

An electric fan was going, which meant that this was a real location. Gorham's squat body, arrayed in an undershirt and a pair of bathing trunks, was shedding perspiration in torrents behind a plain deal table loaded with papers. A telephone was on the table also, and there was a small safe.

"Yeah, I'm a big producer now," roared Gorham, gazing at Red with his small, stony gray eyes.

He owned to being only thirty-three, and Red believed him. Nevertheless, from his half-bald head to his deeply lined face, he looked forty. That face was square and corrugated, with a button nose, an undershot jaw, and a pair of eyes like two pieces of granite sunk in his head.

"How've you been?" rumbled Gorham, leaning back in his chair and putting his arms behind his bullet head. Those eyes were like gimlets now, boring into his former instructor.

"O. K. Lost my ship in a wreck, though."

"O. K. hell! You're on your uppers, you bum!"

Byrne's face flushed, and that flush was a warning. Every conversation, on whatever topic, with Gorham was a battle, and never the twain might meet.

"Interesting if true," Red said steadily. "But what of it?"

"This of it," said the movie man, his eyes boring Byrne's as though trying to find some flaw in him. "I think you're a false front in a lot of ways. You think you, and your opinion, and everything about you is a damn sight more important than it is, but you once did me a favor and I'm going to return it."

Despite himself, the battle flags were flying in Red's eyes. His most vulnerable point was his pride.

"I'm not after any favors, and I won't accept them," he said slowly.

"Oh, you won't! When it comes down to bedrock, you're not going to starve to death before you admit you need a job."

"Out of the goodness of your heart, you're going to sacrifice yourself to give me a job? Is that it?"

"That sounds like you! No, that isn't it, exactly. And get this straight. In the opinion of Rufus Gorham you're

as good as the best flyer that ever lived, if not better."

Again Gorham was bellowing his words, as though making a speech to some huge, unseen audience.

"I'VE seen that screen test of yours. Your photograph is O. K. And you can fly. You probably can't act—you're too stiff and self-conscious in real life—but nobody can act in this blasted town. What I'm getting at is this: You start Monday morning as the leading man of 'Winged War,' at two hundred bucks a week. That loan of yours, back there, is going to pay you good dividends. Rufe Gorham pays his debts."

"Listen, Rufe," and Red spoke evenly, with an effort. "You're not kidding me any. You never did anything that didn't lead to dollars, and the fact of the matter is that you want me for this lead because you think I'm the best man available in Hollywood for what you want. You're doing yourself a bigger favor than you are me, because you're shooting half a million of some angel's money."

Gorham did not answer for a minute. Those little eyes merely bored into Red, and then he said contemptuously:

"I suppose it would be beneath your dignity to take it?"

"I didn't say that."

"Or maybe it doesn't seem so good to be working under the guy that was broke when you were up, the guy that was a cadet when you were an instructor. You can't pull your airs on me any more."

"Not exactly that. I'll admit I don't look forward to having you braying at me all day, but I'll take the job and do the best I can, and I'm glad of the opportunity."

Red said that lightly, and he knew why he had said it. It was because his financial situation was desperate. Deep in his heart he knew that he, crazy fool as he was, would have turned down Gorham's offer if he had as much as one hundred unencumbered dollars to his name.

"That is," Red went on, "under one condition."

"Well, what is it?"

"That you take on Mickey McKay, a damn good flyer who's living with me, as well. He did me a big, good turn."

"The bird who's been living with you? The answer is no. I've got plenty of flyers and can get plenty more."

"But you haven't got plenty of flying leading men, and you can't get plenty more. You're not fooling me, Rufe. Starting Monday, huh? And on Saturday you come to me with the offer of the lead, as a favor. Bunk! You couldn't get whoever you originally wanted, or something, and I'm your last resort, with your location arranged and plenty of money spent already. I'm doing you a favor taking it for two hundred a week, and not holding you up for what steady, tough flying plus acting as leading man is worth. You take on McKay, at a hundred a week for him and ten dollars a day for his ship, plus gas and oil, or I turn the job down!"

His words were the more impressive because of the slow softness with which they were uttered. Gorham stared at the side of the tent, his face set in bitter lines.

Could it be, Red wondered, that Gorham had recognized already in McKay the cadet with whom he had battled years before? No, apparently that was impossible.

"O. K.," snapped Gorham finally. "But let me tell you this. If either you

or this parasite of yours makes a false move or starts blowing around here, you're both going to be canned if I have to go out and dig up another half million! Get in here to-morrow night. Bring all the uniform clothes you've got. And get plenty of rest, because you're going to work, mister!"

RED was not what might be called in love with life as he rode back to Los Angeles as a passenger. He foresaw constant friction ahead. Gorham would ride him plenty, and there would be a public bawling-out every day.

And Mickey McKay. Had Gorham a right to be sore about Red's blackmailing him into hiring McKay?

Then, as happened a dozen times a day, and often at night when he woke up in a cold sweat, that picture of a heaving body and a hot motor came before his mind's eye.

All obligations were subsidiary to that one.

Which was what he inferred to the rumpled McKay when he got back to the house.

"I had to tell him I wouldn't work myself, otherwise," he concluded, "so he finally gave in. I'm glad to do it, of course, but I hope you'll watch your step up there just the same."

McKay, from his restful position on the *chaise longue,* glanced at him quickly with those wide, blankly sparkling eyes. Then his legs described an arc as they landed on the floor, and he stood erect, taking another long drink.

"So I'm working under Foghorn Gorham, eh? Well, well, well! I swore I'd get even with him some day, and taking his money is one way."

"What do you mean? Listen: you're not pulling anything up there."

"Don't worry. Think I'm a sap? But listen yourself."

McKay took a step forward, and now his face was set in bitter lines and his eyes seemed darker, almost muddy, with a red glow in them.

"You're a great guy, and we get along fine together, and you got me this job. But nobody, no time, nowhere, ever tells me what I am or am not to do. Understand?"

For a moment the air was electric. Then Red, calm as a summer sea, but his heart increasing in pace, somehow, got up slowly.

"That's all very well. But I didn't get you a job to give you a chance to pay off any debts. Gorham, with all his faults, deserves a square break. And we two boys are going to give it to him."

The two men stood there, toe to toe, as Red said that.

Suddenly McKay r e l a x e d. He grinned, and his inscrutable eyes widened a trifle and his eyebrows were raised a little more.

"Of course. Let's not be dramatic," he chuckled.

Red wondered whether the chuckle was directed at him.

CHAPTER III.

DISASTER.

IT was just before dusk that McKay brought his crate, Belinda, down on the mile-long expanse of the dry lake, and Red could see that many a change had been wrought in the scene below him since yesterday.

The tent city had increased in size, and the large canvas structures, probably hangars and a dining tent, had been added to them. A dozen or more trucks were drawn up to one side, and

twenty ships of all sizes and kinds, from a twin-motored bomber to little scouts, were on the line.

Probably thirty people, four of them women, were visible here and there, and along the rutted trail which led from the little desert town of Valdez, eight miles away, a few cars were making their laborious way.

Belinda had had her wings lifted, as McKay expressed it. That is, she had been doped and painted, and some of the rust wiped off her wires and motor. Red had had that done, using some of his last few dollars, because he wanted there to be no barrier in the way of the secretive McKay's getting a job.

Gorham, it proved, was in Hollywood until the next morning, so Jim Cowan, the stringy, nervous director, introduced them around. Some of the flyers and actors Red knew, as well as the head camera man and one of the Akley men. McKay, arrayed in oil-stained khaki-breeches, a pair of Red's old army boots, and a ragged shirt of his own, proceeded to mix in with all and sundry and to generate wide and catholic acquaintanceship with everybody from Miss Marjorie Blakley, the leading woman, to Jimmie Cowan himself.

After dinner the extras began to arrive preparatory to the morning shooting. In a seemingly endless line of huge busses they descended on the camp like a flock of locusts on a cornfield. They were men and women of all ages and types and representing most of the nations of the world. Jim Cowan's staff of four assistant directors assigned them to their tents with expedition and dispatch.

Shortly after nine thirty, just as Red was preparing to go to bed in preparation for a dawn-to-dark régime the next day, the warning drone of an airplane foreshadowed the arrival of Mr. Rufus Gorham.

The entire camp poured out on the line to watch the landing, but most of them hung back at some distance from the ship. McKay and Byrne were a bit in advance of the other onlookers, as Gorham climbed out.

"Where's Cowan?" he bellowed and an assistant director scurried off in search of his chief.

Gorham's eyes rested on the pair and without hesitation he strode toward them. There was a mirthless smile on his face as though he was licking his chops in preparation for a good meal.

"Hello, Terry-werry," he said loudly, but his eyes remained on McKay.

Red found himself suddenly tense.

"Is this McKay?" Gorham inquired and his voice could have been heard by any one within half a mile.

"The very same."

"Well, mister, I might as well get things straight with you right away," Gorham told him, his head thrust forward from his bulky shoulders as though daring McKay to resent anything. "I didn't want you up here and I don't want you now. But as long as you have been stuck down my throat I'm going to use you—and how! You're going to work so damn hard that you'll even up for all the time you have been laying around doing nothing. Get me?"

"Oh, come on now, Rufe," Byrne said uncomfortably. "What's the idea of—"

"Never mind what the idea is," droned Gorham. "I'm just telling this parasite here where he gets off, at the start. He isn't going to sponge off Rufe Gorham if I know it."

The extras stared at the three men, and if they talked to each other it was

in tones so low that Red could not hear them.

MICKEY McKAY smoked his cigarette calmly, those unreadable eyes flickering over Gorham with silent contempt. If Gorham recognized the cadet whom he had tried to break years before there was no sign of it.

"Is that all?" McKay finally asked, and there was a sublime impudence in the question.

"Yes, that's all. You have no time to drink and fool around with the women on this location, mister, because you are going to be in the air from morning till night. If you don't want the job that's fine with me."

"Want me, Gorham?" it was Jimmie Cowan's staccato voice, but for a moment Gorham did not answer, his flinty eyes were boring into McKay's; but the airman did not deign to answer. He turned away, and the grin on his face must have been the reason for the flush which mantled Gorham's countenance as he turned to speak to Cowan.

Red advanced quickly until he was alongside McKay.

"That was inexcusable, but it's Rufe Gorham all over," he said soothingly. "Looks as if it wasn't going to be so pleasant around here. But keep your head, will you, Mickey?"

McKay nodded. Somehow Red had the idea there was much going on behind the debonair face of Mickey McKay.

It was nearly two thirty that morning when McKay woke him up by stumbling into the tent which they were to share, considerably drunker than Red had ever seen him.

"You're not going to get far with this stuff," Byrne snapped at him as he observed the meaning of McKay's glazed eyes and slightly flushed face. "You know the call's for six o'clock, on the line ready to work, don't you?"

"I do," McKay told him and went sound asleep with all of his clothes on.

Next morning, red-eyed and slightly woozy, he nevertheless got up at Red's insistence, drank a large eye-opener and made the line on time.

Already there was a battery of three Bell and Howell cameras set up a few yards from the edge of the dry lake, and alongside them were two Akleys—panoramatic cameras.

The extras, dressed as though for the city, were being formed in a long line opposite the cameras. About seventy-five yards from them Byrne, dressed according to orders in boots, breeches, and O. D. shirt, with his make-up on, was spotted by Cowan and Gorham.

"All right, Terry-werry," boomed Gorham. "Front and center and bring your star boarder with you. All right, Jimmie, you tell him."

He said that last with an air of triumph as though he relished what lay ahead of the two men and strode off throwing orders right and left.

"Swell job we've got for you, Byrne," snapped the lean Cowan, his shrunken, over-bright eyes resting on the script in his hand. "All you've got to do is to take off from the ground in a true Immelman turn. Using that S. E. 5 over there."

For a second Byrne just stared at him.

"It can't be done," he said slowly. "That ship hasn't the power to do that—"

"I know it!" barked Cowan. "What you'll actually do is dive it somewhere out of camera range, level out a few inches from the ground, and have all the excess speed you want. We'll get

in a shot of the real take-off and splice it onto the Immelman you make after you dive. It's got to be done. The idea is that there is a plane with machine guns on it, flying up and down over the airdrome to prevent anybody's taking off. This heavy in the plane has dropped a note warning that if anybody takes off he'll shoot him down. You take off, go up in your turn and shoot him down from underneath as you are going up and over—shoot him down before he starts to take a crack at you. See?"

The high-strung director seemed to take such things as a matter of course.

FOR a moment Red considered. So that was the way they were starting in on him! Perhaps it could be done, but one infinitesimal mistake in the flying of it so close to the ground meant a very bad wreck as sure as the sun was shining above them.

He drew a long breath.

"All right. I'll try it in the air a few times and if I decide I can do it, I will."

"You'll do it all right," Cowan told him. "McKay, you're flying that DeHaviland with an Akley man in the back seat to get air shots of it. Now what you do is this," and went into a brief, jerkily phrased description of McKay's job, to which the big flyer seemed to pay little attention.

Byrne walked over to his ship and listened briefly to the engine. The little single-seater had an electric camera mounted on the cowling above the motor and another one attached to the right wing, both of them focused on the cockpit. An assistant director showed him how to turn them on and off.

Five minutes later, his face grim and a little white, Red was in the air.

Three times at fifteen hundred feet he dived the little scout—powered with a 180-horsepower motor. Drawing back on the stick slowly he arched the scout upward in a huge circle. At the top of the arc as he was hanging half on his back he turned it on its horizontal axis until it was right side up again.

Each time the single-seater settled, due to lack of flying speed at the completion of the maneuver; two out of the three times Red knew that if he had started the stunt as close to the ground as the picture required, that mushing-downward would not have stopped before he hit the earth.

"I guess I can do it," he told himself, but his heart sank with the realization that nothing short of actual perfection, not only in his flying but in his judgment of speed, could save him from disaster.

As he landed and received his last instructions he was unaware of the fact that the thousands of extras were buzzing not only on what would happen in a few minutes but also with would-be expert opinions as to whether Terrence Byrne was capable of being a new star in the Hollywood firmament.

He had time to notice that McKay seemed strongly under the influence of his hangover; but as always when Red was faced with a physical ordeal such as lay ahead, his mind was ferociously concentrated on the stunt he was assigned to do, and had little room for anything else. He could worry about McKay later.

McKay, displaying perfect control of his ship in spite of his condition, took the air in the two-seater DeHaviland, the Akley camera man in the back seat standing up with his camera mounted so that it could move in a hundred and eighty degree arc. McKay was to fly parallel with Byrne's ship

and low to the ground, getting a complete shot from take-off to the completion of the stunt.

A second S. E. 5, presumably the villain's plane, took the air and Red taxied out for the take-off.

He turned his ship till it was pointed down toward the cameras; then, waiting until the camera ship was speeding toward him fifty feet higher and a hundred feet to his right, he gave the S. E. 5 the gun and the little scout leaped ahead across the lake bed.

It took the air smoothly and he held it close to the ground, flying it before the cameras with its wheels almost touching the earth.

The D. H. roared alongside of him, passing over the cameras with only a few feet to spare, the camera man in the back seat cranking busily.

The other S. E. 5, flying above and parallel to him, was about five hundred feet high.

THIS done, Red settled down to climb as the cameras ceased their cranking and waited for the crucial shot which would be fitted to the film they already had.

The S. E. 5, its eight-cylinder motor purring sweetly, carried its tense pilot upward steadily and swiftly, but not half fast enough for Byrne. Every minute seemed an eternity and paradoxically he could not wait to find out what was going to happen.

At a thousand feet he circled widely around the lake until he was a quarter of a mile back of his original take-off point. The other S. E. 5, flown by Slim Webster, an experienced picture pilot, was circling watchfully. Webster knew that he must be exactly in position so that his ship could be picked up by the Akley cameras when Red reached the end of his turn.

The D. H. was also circling, prepared to be flying directly above the ground cameras when the crucial maneuver was performed.

Red drew a long breath and then shoved the throttle all the way ahead as he pushed the stick forward. Motionless as a statue in his cockpit, his right arm resting on the cowling of the S. E. 5 and his head slightly over the side, his whole self seemed concentrated in his eyes as he sent the plane down in a terrific power dive.

It was the pilot whom the hostile Gorham had called "as good as any in the world", who slowly brought his flashing ship level until its arch flattened out barely six inches above the ground and within ten feet of the spot where he had started his take-off.

At two hundred miles an hour the little scout shot along above the ground exactly over the course it had taken on the original take-off. Ahead of him barely twenty-five feet high was McKay's D. H., and diving down above him like a meteor was the heavy in the second S. E. 5.

Squarely in front of the camera Red, so immersed in his job that he had forgotten fear, brought the stick slowly backward and his S. E. 5 shot upward in a fast, even turn. Down below him the Akleys' muzzles had been raised to follow his course.

The extras were held in a grip of a thrill so great that they could not talk.

Up and up he went until as his ship fairly stood on its tail he pressed the gun control on his stick and his machine guns shot long streaks of specially prepared flame from their muzzles.

He was dimly aware that Slim Webster's S. E. 5 had roared past, above him. Then with rudder and stick he struggled to get his ship right side up. He thought it falling from

beneath as it turned with maddening slowness. The ground seemed to rush up to meet him. He was right side up but mushing downward, fighting to keep his ship from stalling. He pressed the stick forward and an instant later was diving toward the ground. He had barely speed enough for the controls to be effective. Not fifteen feet from the ground, he had picked up enough momentum to level out, and his tires kissed the ground lightly as the S. E. 5 found the power to start into a gradual climb. Byrne relaxed thankfully.

"Not an inch to spare," he breathed as he banked gradually around.

He looked back at the scene of the shot.

HIS eyes widened unbelievingly as he strove to comprehend what was happening there on the ground.

The extras, apparently out of control of the assistant directors, were streaming toward what had been a line of cameras. Those cameras now were only so many bits of wreckage on the ground. Circling around overhead was the camera ship, its right wheel gone.

Then Byrne realized what must have happened. McKay had flown too low in getting the shot and had plowed through the camera line. Perhaps fifty thousand dollars' worth of equipment had been ruined, the film record of Red's stunt was wiped out, and in the air was a ship which would be a certain wreck when it landed. That meant that the camera in that ship would be destroyed as well.

Red sent his S. E. 5 back over the scene of the disaster and turned off the electric cameras automatically, as a gust of such fury as he had not felt before in his life swept over him.

The drunken McKay had just about ruined Rufe Gorham, had probably knocked off a couple of camera men, very possibly had wrecked the whole production.

A second later he was over the débris which had been the cameras and there was momentary relief as he saw that the camera men must have saved themselves by throwing themselves to the ground before the ship hit them.

Then, as he saw a dozen men clearing the lake bed so that the ships could land, Byrne got hold of himself.

He had been responsible for getting McKay on the picture, and every dollar's worth of damage was directly up to him. Suddenly he was in the grip of a sort of icy calm and his mind seemed to work with the precision of a machine as the first of several steps which he must take emerged in full detail in his mind.

He flew his S. E. 5 close to the crippled DeHaviland and, his white face impassive, made several signals which apparently were understood.

The camera man seemed to be in a panic, but Mickey McKay returned the signals blithely. Red resolutely kept himself from thinking about it, but in his subconscious mind there was the sickening consciousness that perhaps McKay had flown into those cameras deliberately.

He came down for his landing and almost as soon as he hit the ground he turned his ship toward the seething line.

Seething scarcely described it. A half dozen camera men aided and abetted by their assistants were announcing in no uncertain terms their opinion of Mickey McKay, the picture, Gorham and the world in general.

Gorham was bellowing like a bull and wildly excited extras were milling

about while Jimmie Cowan smiled sardonically at the sight of his assistants on the verge of apoplexy.

Byrne had literally been forced into a great calm. He was conscious always of the fact that the accident had been the result either of McKay's being drunk or, worse still, of deliberate design. Red Byrne, and nobody else, had been responsible for forcing the presence of the devil-may-care pilot on Gorham.

Consequently, with everything to gain and nothing to lose, he was finally about to cleave his way to the middle of the swirling mob, and his slow icy suggestions seemed to act as a wet blanket on the raving of the temperamental picture people.

Ten minutes later, with Slim Webster, a human flagpole, who had flown as many hours for the camera as most flyers had all together at the controls of a two-seater DeHaviland, he was taking off to make such expedition as he could to repair the disaster for which he had been responsible.

CHAPTER IV.

STANDING ON NOTHINGNESS.

THE two DeHavilands were a thousand feet high and squarely over the middle of the dry lake. Byrne felt his signals had conveyed to the apparently untroubled McKay exactly what he planned to do. Further proof lay in the fact that the camera man in the back seat of McKay's ship had got over his panic long enough to prepare his camera for a shot of what was to happen. Not another camera was available on location.

It was only a little after seven o'clock in the morning, and the first bumps bore warning of the fact that flying would be impossible later in the day because of the desert heat.

Webster, his lantern jaw operating methodically on a huge chew of tobacco, flew straight and level as Byrne, with a spare wheel strapped on his back, climbed over him from the back cockpit.

Red hauled himself up on top of the center section, and as he lay prone on his airy perch he realized suddenly that the terrific airstream compounded of the propeller blast and the speed of the ship seemed about to lift him entirely off his ship. The area of the tire was sufficient to make the airstream an almost deadly thing.

Not until he had inched himself toward the tip of the right wing and got clear of the propeller blast did he dare to relax his hold on the wing's leading edge. Even then he was far from comfortable, though he had nothing but the speed of the ship to fight, and he was aware of the fact that the wheel was gradually becoming a heavy burden.

He deliberately blotted that from his mind, however. The miserable consciousness that he was responsible for a disaster which might result in the ruin of the man whose wages he was taking resulted in an even more ferocious concentration on the job at hand than was customary with him in emergency. Any hesitancy in going ahead was unthinkable.

He reached the cabane strut through which the aileron controls passed, and for a moment he lay and glanced back at McKay's ship.

The DeHaviland with the smashed wheel was fifty feet to the right of him and possibly the same distance back of him. The camera man was cranking busily.

"We'll add one good shot of a man

getting to the top wing anyway," Byrne told himself with a mirthless grin.

Now McKay, flying as Red knew he could fly, was easing his ship over toward the lower one.

Clinging to the cabane strut and fighting the airstream, Red got to his knees. Then slowly he was on his feet. His left foot was within six inches of the entering edge of the wing, his right foot two feet back of that; practically all his weight was on his left foot, which had as its base the heavy entering edge. He was stooping low, still clinging to the cabane strut and leaning forward against the airstream until his body and head were literally projecting over space.

Slim Webster, veteran of a hundred flights like this, flew as level as though there was not a hundred and eighty pounds on the tip of his wing.

Only the tightening ailerons were evidence of the fact that flying conditions were far from normal. With the airstream ripping at the spare wheel as though trying to tear it from Byrne's back, while the weight of it seemed more and more to crush him down, Red waited, eyes never leaving the whirling propeller of McKay's ship.

The slightest miscalculation on McKay's part or even an unusual bump at a certain time would result in having that six-foot metal-tipped stick cut through him like a knife going through soft butter.

NOW the tip of McKay's lower left wing was even with the tail of Webster's ship and about six feet higher. McKay seemed to be half skidding his ship in closer.

Byrne, leaning out over space, was momentarily unconscious of the fact that the ground was a thousand feet below or that there was anything in the universe except bellowing motors and that terrific airstream. The curving wing-skid underneath McKay's wing was the center of his world.

His lean face was set and curiously calm, but behind his goggles his eyes were two glowing pools as though all the tautness within him was concentrated in them.

Now the propeller tip was whirling within five feet of him, directly on a line with his head. The wing-skid was five feet higher than he was and five feet back of him. He released his hold on the cabane strut and rose a little from his half crouch.

A second later the DeHaviland seemed to dip slightly and skid to the right. For an instant the skid was slightly above his head. It was then that he straightened as though some inner spring had been released, and a second later his left elbow crooked and went over the strut, and his right hand gripped his left one, as McKay's DeHaviland swung him off into space.

It was as though his arm was a hook fitting into its eye.

Webster dived away from McKay's ship; Byrne, his body whipped back in the airstream, was hanging to the skid over a thousand feet of nothingness.

Instantly that wheel became like a stone hung around the neck of a drowning man. As he stretched his right hand up to the grip on the tip of the wing, the instant during which he was hanging by his left arm alone was a torturing ordeal. Never had he suffered so before, though he had done the same stunt twice without a wheel on his back.

Suddenly it seemed to him that he didn't have a chance. For ten full seconds he hung, his left hand gripping the wing strut and his right the tip of

the wing. Sheer panic made him tremble like a leaf as he realized that he did not dare intrust himself even momentarily to his right hand alone.

He felt himself weakening ever so little, and that was like the last nail in his coffin. Never before had he lost confidence in the stringy steel-like muscles which had carried him to national fame as an athlete years before. He had never known what it was to be doubtful of his own strength. And he knew only too well that every passing second reduced what little chance he had to survive.

The airstream was fairly tearing the breath from his nostrils, and he knew that he could hang on but little longer. He gathered himself, his face as white as chalk and his eyes dark with pain, and in one flashlike movement his left hand released its hold and darted over to the wing tip.

He had felt the grip of his right hand weakening during that split second, but he made it in time.

Now the tire caught the full force of the blast of air. Like some solid physical substance it penetrated between body and the wheel as if trying to tear it from his back. Its weight seemed to be increased several times over, and his muscles were like lead.

With scarcely an iota of hope for survival, he was all at once possessed of a vast fatalism. Like a man smiling at the rifles raised to kill him, because nothing else he could do would be of any help, he swung his feet upward—knowing that he could not make it, doing it just as a last bold gesture before he should fall tumbling to the earth.

There was an effect of stupefied surprise when he felt his muscles answer as though all the strength stored up in them for years had generated a reserve power which he had not known was there. His feet raised bit by bit. His face twisted with sheer physical pain, and his whole frame was trembling as inch by inch he forced his body to answer.

His hands seemed to have become without feeling, and it was as though the muscles of them had been locked in their position and could not let go. It was like trying to chin himself with an immovable weight attached to his body.

Somehow his left foot caught a grip on the wing, and with his leg supplying leverage he found himself lying flat along it, clinging to a strut like a drowning man to a straw, as his breath came in great labored pants and he went weak.

Half regretfully the camera man ceased cranking for the moment.

RED knew that many an ambitious aërial acrobat had been swept to his death carrying a wheel on his back. The modern procedure was to use a false wheel weighing only a pound or two for the actual change from ship to ship.

It was a full five minutes before Red had regained a semblance of his strength and under Mickey McKay's quizzical eyes made his way down to the undercarriage. Sitting on the spreader bar he succeeded in the not too difficult job of attaching the new wheel.

The DeHaviland came down for its landing, its wires singing a triumphant song, with Red Byrne riding the lower wing and clinging to McKay's cockpit. Their eyes had really met but once and when they did Byrne's blue-gray ones were as hard and stony as Rufe Gorham's had ever been.

Mickey McKay's were glinting as

brightly and inexplicably as always. McKay lifted an imaginary glass in a toast to Byrne and drank it in pantomime, but there was no answering smile from the man who now sacrificed perhaps his very honor while under the spell of a mental picture of the beach between San Diego and Hollywood.

No sooner had they landed than Byrne automatically reached into the cockpit and cut off the ignition. A tidal wave of people washed toward the ship as it turned toward the line, and the whirling propeller was a deadly thing.

The ship came to a stop twenty-five feet from the line and was instantly engulfed by a milling crowd of extras, many of whom knew from second-hand knowledge what Red had gone through. At the forefront of the mob was Rufe Gorham.

As Red leaped off the wing and McKay climbed out of his cockpit—that indomitable ragamuffin, bowing mockingly to the crowd and blowing kisses right and left—Gorham's bellow rang out so loudly that all conversation suddenly ceased.

"Mister, you're not only fired, you're going to be arrested," he roared.

Byrne was as motionless as the ship itself, his face a mask for shadowed eyes. He watched the two men.

Gorham's face was drawn and there was a murderous ugliness in it.

"Come over to my office," Gorham boomed, glaring into the eyes which refused to drop.

Suddenly Byrne was as sure as he was of anything in the world that Gorham intended to beat McKay half to death. The producer was literally shaking with abysmal fury.

"Oh, be yourself!" McKay said carelessly as though acting a part for the benefit of the onlookers. "The shots you got out of this are worth twenty cameras. However, let's go."

Unshaven, his face grimy with oil and his unhelmeted head a wild disarray of tangled hair, the ragged McKay started for the shack forthwith. Gorham followed him, his head thrust forward and his big fists clenched at his sides, for all the world like a bloodhound plowing along in the wake of a greyhound.

The camera man was still shaking from the strain of his ordeal as he explained to all and sundry what had happened.

BYRNE found himself following Gorham and McKay and his mind was so busy that he never even noticed the words that were thrown at him as he went through the crowd like a man in a dream.

Twenty yards ahead of him at the entrance of the shack McKay suddenly turned and awaited Gorham. Gorham walked toward him, his thick neck jutted forward. Without warning he half pushed, half knocked McKay through the doorway, then whirled.

"All you guys get away from this shack!" he roared. "Bennie, drive them all away."

A fat little assistant director obediently started to fulfill the order, but he did not bother Byrne.

Red stopped to light a cigarette. He seemed without physical feeling for some reason or another. He was like a man who found himself in a situation so grave that he had passed the stage of nervousness or fear. Yet, exactly what could he do to expiate what he considered to be the most unjustifiable act in his life and one which he felt instinctively might result in a man's ruin?

He heard Gorham shouting within

and then suddenly there was silence. McKay must be talking.

Byrne walked slowly into the shack. He stopped at the doorway, his eyes focused on the two men. McKay was sitting nonchalantly on the edge of Gorham's desk, his back at an angle to the door and only the profile of his mocking face visible to Byrne.

In the chair behind the desk Gorham was sitting and Byrne got the impression that he had just slumped into his chair. There was a dazed look in the squat producer's eyes and his lined face seemed to have sagged. It seemed that the man had collapsed like an exploded balloon and every furrow in his face was deeper.

"Then I don't get fired?" McKay inquired easily.

Gorham's eyes dropped, one trembling hand played with the telephone. There was an instant of silence, then McKay got up.

"Thanks," he said with that toothy grin. "Hello, Carrots. Thank you, too. I guess this makes us all even."

For a moment Byrne looked at him.

"You're damned right it does," he said.

What McKay held over Gorham, Red could not guess, but he was sure that matters would not stand as they were. In a few days would come the crisis, he told himself. He was right, as subsequent events proved.

CHAPTER V.

"I'LL SHOOT HIM DOWN."

THE following Saturday afternoon McKay, looking even more frowzy and unshaven than ever, came into the little tent which he and Byrne shared, to find Red reclining on his cot trying to get some sleep.

It was the first respite that the lean flyer had had since that hectic Sunday morning which had marked his début as an actor.

"Thought you were going to Los Angeles," McKay said surprisingly.

"No, decided I didn't have the energy," drawled Byrne.

The two men looked at each other speculatively. Ever since that morning there had been on Byrne's part so many reservations concerning McKay that his attitude was bound to be different.

McKay was as devil-may-care as ever, but he seemed to realize the strain without being bothered at all. He had been persistently cultivating a hook-nosed, bony-faced tramp pilot named Cary and it had become his practice to spend his evenings with Cary in the little desert town near by, usually in company with a couple of the women from the extra ranks.

Consequently Red had seen little of him except in the early morning when both were getting up and the subjects of Rufe Gorham and the events of the week before had been avoided as though by mutual consent. Byrne was always aware of a curious feeling, however, that McKay was laughing at him as though all that had happened between himself and Gorham was a very clever joke which had reacted to McKay's advantage.

"Well, I'm going to Los to-night—to stay," McKay informed him. "Going to go out and celebrate to-night at getting rid of the parasite?"

"Why should I?" Byrne asked easily.

"Just thought you might," grinned McKay. "Where's Rufe Gorham, do you know?"

McKay was moving quickly around the tent collecting his belongings. For some reason it seemed to Red that the

curious inner fire in McKay was burning more brightly than ever. He acted like a man who had a great deal on his mind and was anticipating something with great relish.

"He flew to Los Angeles to get his pay roll," Byrne replied, while he thought to himself: "McKay knew that, why is he asking me?"

"Oh, he did?" McKay returned casually. "I thought those shots of machine gun practice were going to come off this afternoon."

"If the heat dies down, they are," Red said wearily.

Somehow it seemed to him as though every last drop of vitality had been squeezed out of him. The enervating heat of the days, the savage driving to which the entire company had been subjected by Gorham and Cowan, the brunt of which Red bore, and above all, the mental misery which had never left him for the past week, combined to make life a weary thing for him.

Every time he looked at Gorham, Red felt his responsibility for the catastrophe; and the curious effect of whatever McKay had said there in the shack a week ago was always evident.

Gorham still bellowed and roared his way during the days, but when either McKay or Byrne was around it seemed as if he was conscious of the fact that his poise was nothing but bluff. How Gorham was going to last, financially, Red did not know, but he did know that Gorham was a shrunken-eyed haggard shell of the rock-like man who had undertaken to produce this picture.

"SO you're leaving us flat," Byrne said casually. "Going to stay in Hollywood, I suppose."

"No! More good news," McKay said mockingly, "Belinda and I are taking off for parts unknown. I'm sick of this racket already and every time I look at that blasted Gorham it's all I can do to keep from hitting him in the nose. Those cadet days—" He stopped there, but as always when he mentioned what must have been a great ordeal of the past, Red realized the depth of bitterness which had rightly or wrongly been generated in the big flyer. Lots of cadets had run a savage gantlet when they were learning to fly, and Red could realize the probability of Gorham's having been the most unpleasant instructor in the American army.

"Well, that is news," Byrne said and a great feeling of relief swept over him.

"Hello, who's taking off at this hour of the day?" McKay said surprisedly.

There was no flying in the middle of the day on location due to the terrific heat and the air conditions, yet there was the unmistakable noise of a ship taking off.

Byrne got to his feet and went to the door of the tent. The line was practically deserted, but an assistant director was walking toward him, his head turned to watch the S. E. 5 which was just taking the air.

"What's the idea?" yelled Byrne.

"Search me," returned the bewildered director. "It's Cary and that's one of the machine gun ships."

"What do you suppose has gotten into that cuckoo?" McKay inquired.

Byrne did not answer. For a moment he watched the S. E. 5 bank around and then, without waiting to get altitude, start on a bee-line for Los Angeles.

"Probably the old son of a sea cook is drunk and decided he wanted to go to Los," McKay chuckled.

The big tent city extending backward and on both sides of their tent was quiet as most of the extras seized the opportunity for a midday siesta. Nevertheless a few of them came to the doors of their tents, curious to see whether there had been a call for some shots.

Jimmie Cowan, walking with long nervous strides, came out of the headquarters shack. He barked a few questions at the director, and Byrne walked toward him without thinking particularly what he was doing. Cowan spotted McKay in the doorway of the tent and cupped his hands to yell:

"What's your sidekick up to?"

"Search me. Must be drunk," McKay shouted back.

"Well, he took a ship we've got to have for the sequence this afternoon," Cowan barked to Byrne. "Get in a ship and chase the crazy fool. Damn these flyers anyway—there isn't a sane man in the whole works. No, you can't go after all. Stars are too valuable to risk. McKay, get in a Corsair. I'll rout out another flyer. Chase that bum and if you find him drunk where he lands in Los Angeles one of you can fly his ship back here. Damn it, if we don't have the plane it'll cost an extra day for all these extras. Hustle up, I don't care who you take. Fred, rout out a couple of the mechanics."

The stringy director barked orders right and left. The whole camp, as though affected by some subterranean knowledge that something unusual had happened, seemed to stir into life.

Byrne did not know exactly what to think. Cary was an irresponsible pilot who had been a stunt man for a while until he had been hurt so often that he was, so to speak, slightly punch-drunk. Probably he had a few drinks and had taken off for the city. As Cowan had said, that ship—one of the three armed scouts on location—was vitally necessary for the shots that afternoon and the sequence in which it was to be used was the last one which required the presence of the expensive mob of extras.

"Only my tender heart causes me to do this," McKay murmured, "because as far as this picture is concerned I'm through." Those shallow eyes seemed to be wider than ever and the line of the eyebrows more pronounced as he said that.

Two mechanics were hurrying toward one of the Corsairs on the line, and McKay dived into the tent to get his helmet and goggles.

Byrne followed him in a minute later, just as the Corsair's motor started to warm up. He found McKay folding up a sheet of paper. Byrne was restless somehow and a curious sense of foreboding swept over him. However, that was nothing new.

"See you around," McKay said casually as he walked out of the tent. He was holding that sheet of paper in his hand and a moment later Byrne saw him climb into the ship—without the other flyer who was to accompany him.

THE twelve-cylinder Liberty had suddenly burst into a full-throated roar as McKay shoved the throttle all the way. The Corsair leaped the wheel blocks and was taking off with only McKay in it.

The sheet of paper which he had held in his hand he had thrust into the hand of a mechanic at the very last minute, and now the man was gazing down at it stupidly. Byrne found himself running toward the fellow.

It seemed that the whole camp was astir now. Cowan was running toward the line gesticulating furiously

and from every tent people were appearing in all stages of dress and undress.

Byrne snatched the note from the mechanic and for a second he too was unable to comprehend the meaning of it:

> If anybody tries to take off I'll shoot him down. McKAY.

Then the real significance of what had happened swept over Byrne in a sickening wave. He turned to the cursing Cowan and said:

"See what they're up to, Jimmie? Rufe has got forty or fifty thousand dollars in cash in his ship. Cary's going to hold him up and then they are going to beat it."

"Right!" snapped Cowan.

"McKay would have been stealing a ship anyway in a few minutes," Byrne went on evenly. "Now he's got the Corsair, the fastest ship on the field—"

"And it had to be this very afternoon that we would be using five ships with working machine guns for this target practice sequence," Cowan raved, "and Rufe hasn't even got a gun on his ship."

The Corsair was flying in lazy circles around the field.

Byrne was as sure of the plans of the two flyers as though he had heard them discussed. Cary would force Gorham down, get the money, and he and McKay would meet in Mexico.

McKay would hold the fort long enough to give Cary plenty of time and then be on his way. There was absolutely nothing that could be done about it except to notify the Los Angeles police, and then it would be impossible to take any effective action. Rockwell Field ships at San Diego might take the air and try to head off the flyers, but it would be miraculous luck if they happened to pick up the fugitives.

The Corsair was flying low as though to be prepared for quick and decisive action.

Cowan and Byrne were surrounded by an ever-increasing mob of excited people, yet during that terrible minute it seemed to Red that he was absolutely alone.

Cowan was cursing steadily, but Red scarcely heard him. The loss of that fifty thousand dollars would complete Gorham's ruin and McKay, the man Red had forced him to accept, would be responsible for it.

Then as though all the mental anguish which had been Red's lot during the past week had suddenly crystallized, Byrne realized what he would do.

"Start an S. E.," he found himself saying, and without a word of explanation to Cowan or anybody else he began pushing his way through the crowd.

The tall figure of Slim Webster loomed before him.

"What are you going to do?" Webster demanded quietly.

"After I get him out of the air, you boys hike along the course to Los Angeles and stop that hold-up," Byrne told him almost without looking at him.

There was something about the expression in his face and eyes that seemed to stop questions. Such as were asked him he did not answer.

HE got into the cockpit of an S. E., Cowan standing alongside the ship and begging for information. But Red did not dare tell any one the mad thing he planned. He felt instinctively that he would be stopped by main force from doing what he intended.

The Corsair, about five hundred feet high, was flying toward him and in a few seconds passed directly over the line of ships where Red's plane stood.

"Swing the prop when I tell you," he commanded an awestruck mechanic.

Now the Corsair was roaring directly above his head, headed down the line of ships on the edge of the dry lake bed. At that instant Red yelled contact, the mechanic swung the prop and the eight-cylinder motor burst into life. Without waiting to warm it Red shoved the throttle all the way ahead. With right rudder he swung his ship until it was taking off on a course almost parallel to the line of ships.

The Corsair was a hundred yards ahead of him, five hundred feet higher as the S. E. scuttled across the hard-packed sand.

A few seconds after he had got under way he saw the Corsair bank over the field. McKay had seen him and doubtless knew exactly who was piloting that S. E. 5.

The Corsair was now flying at a right angle to the scout's course and Red eased left rudder and swerved his ship until the line of its take-off would intersect the Corsair's course.

"McKay must be puzzled," Byrne thought.

There was plenty of time for the higher ship to feel out the lay of the land and still be able to shoot down the S. E. without danger to itself. Possibly McKay was in the grip of a curiosity so strong that he did not desire to act immediately.

Red eased back on the stick and the S. E. answered. Red leveled it a foot from the ground to gather speed. The Corsair was fifty yards ahead of him and still five hundred feet high. It was then, his hand on the gun control, that Red made his move. Back came the stick and with the slight excess speed which that momentary flight parallel to the ground had given him he sent the little ship upward with the stick all the way back in his lap. The frail little craft answered gallantly the last call that would ever be made on it.

It seemed to fairly stand on its tail as it zipped upward. Red was crouched in his seat sliding along toward his guns.

At the instant when the scout seemed to be hanging on its prop, stalled, the bulk of the Corsair loomed before Byrne's eyes. A hail of lead poured from his guns as he automatically fought his ship to keep it hanging.

Then its nose seemed to snap down with such suddenness that Byrne's head jerked back and hit the cowling behind him. He was barely three hundred feet high as the stalled plane went into a nose dive. He had known from the start that his only chance to knock down the Corsair was directly after he left the ground before McKay could make a move, and he had also known that to get his shot he would have to stall his ship so close to the ground that there would be no possibility of saving himself.

In the split second that the dive started, he had unfastened his belt, cut the ignition, and with his hands gripping the cowling behind him, had fairly swung himself bodily out of the cockpit.

The pilotless ship rushed downward with Red's body stretched along the top of the fuselage. Then like a rider on an outlaw horse, arms and legs clasping the fuselage, he pushed himself back toward the tail. It was one tiny chance for life, but it was worth taking.

A hundred feet from the ground he was touching the tail surface and suddenly a sort of mad exultation replaced that fatalistic calm which had possessed him.

The ship had not yet picked up flying speed; now he felt it answer to his weight on the tail. Slowly the nose started to come up. Twenty feet from the ground his weight took full effect and the ship seemed to waver as the nose suddenly came up high in the air. It was then that Red deliberately fell off his perch, feet first.

Trained athlete that he was, he was still unable to drop as he planned. He felt his head going forward as a loud crash announced the crack-up of the Corsair.

He landed heavily, falling forward. The earth seemed to leap up to hit him. An instant of agonizing pain and then consciousness left him as though his brain had exploded.

CHAPTER VI.

BEHIND THE MASK.

WHEN he came to he was in a Los Angeles hospital. He found out later that the location doctor had mercifully given him opiates in the event that he should come out of his coma before he was safely installed there.

It seemed as if he was bandaged from head to foot; he was dizzy and weak and sick.

A buxom nurse got up from her chair at the window and moved toward him.

"What time is it? Where am I and what's the matter with me?" he drawled weakly.

"It's Sunday morning. You've got one broken arm and two broken legs, but you're going to be perfectly all right," she said cheerily.

"You mean that? You don't need to kid me," he said, his eyes searching her beaming face.

"Absolutely. The breaks were as clean as a whistle, and they'll set perfectly," she assured him. "Now take this and go back to sleep."

When he awakened again that evening he had just been dreaming about Rufus Gorham. By the time he really became conscious of what was happening around him, he recognized a whisper which was approximately as loud as the average person's shout. He opened his eyes to meet the eyes of Rufus Gorham, an interne, and a new and better-looking nurse.

"Well, well, well, Terry-werry," roared Gorham. "How is the old health to-night?"

"Oh, fair enough, I guess. Were you held up?"

"That damned—pardon me, nurse—Cary had me on the ground when the boys got there," Gorham stated.

There was a different look in his eyes and a softer note about the whole man, Byrne felt oddly, as Gorham went on with loud joviality:

"Listen, Sawbones, how about you and nursey-wursey getting the hell out of here so I can have some private conversation for a minute?"

"I'll give you two minutes," the young doctor told him as he and the nurse went out.

"Is McKay dead or alive?" Byrne asked without particular interest. He couldn't be notably interested in anything, the way he felt.

"He died a couple of hours after the wreck, thanks be," Gorham told him. "Said to tell you he'd have taken a drink to you if he'd had one to take."

The ghost of a smile flitted over Byrne's wan face. That would be the way McKay would choose to die, he thought.

"And, listen, young fellow," blared Gorham—though his eyes, for the first time in Byrne's experience with him, belied his harsh tones. "What do you mean by trying to wash out the star of my picture?"

"I don't know," Red answered dully. "I never thought of that, I guess."

"Well, I'm not one to cry over spilt milk. We might as well get things straight." Gorham said as though it was difficult to bring out the words. "All in all this McKay has cost me a fortune, but it so happens that it turned out to be a good investment. Do you know that Si Watkins was cranking an Akley camera when you shot down McKay? He got the greatest shot that an air picture ever had."

Byrne gave a hearty grin that lit up his whole face with a warm glow.

"Watkins would ask permission to crank a camera at his own execution," he drawled.

Gorham went on doggedly.

"As a result of all this publicity, Colossal Pictures asked to see the rushes this very morning, and as a result they're going to put in all the dough necessary and shoot the picture; so why should I worry if it's a month before you can go back to work?"

"That's great, Rufe. I'm glad you got a break after all the trouble I caused you."

"THERE wouldn't have been any trouble if he hadn't had plenty on me," Gorham told him. "I might as well come clear to you. When I was broke and plumb desperate a few months ago, I did some smuggling, and McKay found out all about it in Mexico. That was his racket, I guess. But he had me dead to rights."

Byrne nodded. He had suspected something of the sort.

"I'm not proud of it," Gorham went on. "But it was just immigrants, no dope or liquor. That makes me a jailbird, I suppose."

There was a curious note in his voice as though he was pleading with Byrne not to think too badly of him.

Byrne nodded. "Forget it," he said.

Rufe looked relieved.

"You're a hell of a sight more human now than you've ever been before, Terry-werry. You and I are going to make a lot of dough in this racket."

Byrne met the hard-bitten Gorham's eyes, and it was like a physical shock to realize they were not ruthless. Suddenly he saw the harsh exterior of the man as a scar which hid the wound that was his spirit. Sometime, somewhere, Gorham had been badly hurt.

"I hope so," Byrne smiled.

"You're the first guy I ever met who'd go through for me," Gorham said slowly. "We're as far apart as a wolf and a racehorse, Terry-werry my boy, but sometimes double harness gets results. In this picture racket I need you. You've arrived, my boy, in those rushes. And you need me. O. K?"

The gruff words were a plea from a very lonely man. And Red Byrne meant it when he said:

"O. K. with me. But—for the love of Pete, quit calling me Terry-werry, will you?"

A Gargantuan bellow of a laugh shook the ceiling.

"That isn't half what I'll be calling you when we're on the job together, you big tramp!"

THE END.

William, who had never been able to detest pippins, caught his breath

Moving Day

Struggling desperately to raise the money for his honeymoon, young William Gwynn has a vanload of trouble thrust upon him

By EDGAR FRANKLIN

Author of "Every Minute Counts," "Now We're Rich," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

WILLIAM GWYNN, attractive and rather too gallant young real-estate man, finds himself in a bad jam when his fiancée, frightened at his attentions to other girls at a dance the evening before, insists that he must elope with her that evening—far ahead of the date set for their wedding. He finds he has inherited the Don Juan reputation of his late cousin, Peter Spofford.

The firm of Gwynn & Little is financially involved; and to his horror he finds that the New York capitalist Morson, who has his private securities, will be out of town for weeks.

Desperate, he manages to scrape up $500; but he has to have $1500 more by evening to buy a roadster and finance his honeymoon—and he dares not scrimp, for his sweetheart, June Stannard, is wealthy.

This story began in the Argosy for July 5.

In the midst of his frenzied efforts to borrow he has to reclaim a moving van which his firm had sold on commission to a deadbeat, and deliver it to its owner, Grober, in a near-by town; if it is not delivered, the owner threatens to sue the firm for $2300.

CHAPTER V.

A PLEA FOR HELP.

GWYNN, righting himself after the forward lurch of the van against the curb, relaxed his tense hold upon the steering-wheel. Now why hadn't he thought of *that* before?

Sheer delight surged through William as, with a brief, lively little struggle, he started the engine once more and rolled ahead; for the answer to it all was—Grober!

This John Grober was a crude and unlettered person; but like many another man of his type he had always seemed to entertain a rather shy and humble respect for persons who were not crude and unlettered—and William was neither. Also, Grober was rich! Fifteen hundred dollars meant just about as much to Grober as fifteen dollars meant to William, even normally.

Still more, he liked Gwynn, as he had proved once or twice by little deeds of no great consequence; repeatedly, he had asked William's advice about this or that, and had always seemed to regard it as the advice of a keen, progressive business man. In fine, Grober, blissfully unaware of William's present financial crisis, looked like the individual appointed by Providence to loan him fifteen hundred dollars for a week or two!

He'd have a mighty good approach, too, Mr. Gwynn thought happily as he urged his van onward! Returning this bedeviled vehicle in person indicated real service and lots of conscience. Mr. Grober would hardly argue with a busy man who went to such lengths that a client might secure his full rights; he'd just thank William and be a little bit ashamed, probably, and then hear what William had to say about the fifteen hundred—and laboriously write his check. Why, right now, the whole performance was as good as over with!

Gayly, then, did William laugh as he just missed bowling over a Downford crosstown trolley car. Gayly he laughed as he slowed down at a corner and considered. The shortest route, by a mile or more, would be straight out Greenfield Avenue—a wide and highly desirable residential street. He had any number of friends along it who would laugh their fool heads off if ever they saw him driving this thing. What of it? William himself laughed again, blew his horn with all the zest of a small boy, and rumbled into Greenfield Avenue, grinning expectantly from side to side.

Presently he sobered somewhat and grew thoughtful. It might be just as well to plan his campaign. Of course, there'd be an opening speech, properly filled with indignation at the man Dowd and the annoyance he had caused Mr. Grober. Then he'd pass to the theme of Gwynn & Little and their absolutely fixed policy of satisfying every client.

Next, in whatever graceful way might be indicated at the moment, he would dwell modestly upon the almost fanatic devotion of Mr. Gwynn, the senior partner, to this ideal, probably making a few effective gestures toward the lurid van, as offering proof

of the highest visibility. And then, almost on the point of leaving, he'd refer to the vague operation upon which he was about to embark and, being a thoroughly good fellow, would offer to let Mr. Grober have a little of it—and guarantee to pay him ten per cent within the month. The nicest thing about it all was that Grober actually would get his ten per cent, too!

That was the general idea, anyway. In his present new calm he could safely trust to his wits for the details. William whistled a little tune and—

"Oh, Mr. Gwynn!" cried a voice mistily familiar.

William only partly roused.

"Oh, Mr. Gwynn! Please! *Please*, Mr. Gwynn!"

WILLIAM sat up with a jerk. Was he running over somebody or— Oh! Mr. Gwynn's throat tightened. His head bade him speed on—on, with never another glance! His foot, oddly enough, went down upon the brake, and he slowed and stared, smiling gallantly at little Mrs. Worth!

Aye, the girl with whom he had danced three times too often last night; the girl whom he had promised June to shun like the plague! She was standing at the curb before a neat little house and waving frantically to him and—well, she was a pippin!

William, who had never been able to detest pippins, all but caught his breath. Her hair was like fluffy, curly yellow silk. Her eyes were deep and blue as midsummer skies when—well, that was about enough of that! William executed one more start, this time of annoyance. He actually had not meant to stop; but the engine had attended to that for him.

Now, with not more than six feet between them, he was still smiling at the lady. The smile died as he noted, with sudden concern, that the lady was not smiling at all, but was looking up at him with the great, pathetic eyes of a frightened child.

"Oh, Mr. Gwynn!" she cried once more, and breathlessly. "I'm so glad that you're here—and with *that!*" She pointed hysterically, almost, at Mr. Grober's van; her laugh was high and uncertain. "It's—oh, it's too wonderful!"

"Isn't it?" William muttered.

Likening that sort of teeth to mere pearls was handing a lot of undeserved flattery to any pearls he had even seen.

"Won't you—come down here where we can talk?" the girl pleaded; and whole families have been shot to pieces for smiles less dazzling than the one with which she favored William Gwynn.

William chilled suddenly.

"I—ah—I'm horribly sorry, but I'm in a rush just now, Mrs. Worth—I thought last night you were Miss Worth, by the way, and—well, that has nothing to do with it, of course, but I'm so pressed for time that—"

"Oh!" Mrs. Worth said quiveringly.

"You're not in trouble, are you?" Gwynn asked suddenly.

"Oh, I'm in dreadful trouble! Won't you please come down?"

There was at least some stern stuff in William Gwynn. He hesitated. Here was a charming person to whom he had sworn not to talk—by telephone, that was to say. Well, this wasn't by telephone. It was worse, probably, or June would think it worse, but—well, good Lord, because a man is engaged he doesn't necessarily lose every shred of decency and chivalry, does he? He doesn't turn into the sort

of bounder that abandons helpless women when they're being threatened by—er—something or other!"

Nothing very awful was afoot here; that was a foregone conclusion. Hearing about it wouldn't take more than five minutes, and, since he had all but settled the matter of his fifteen hundred dollars, five minutes one way or the other was not of much account. So William hopped nimbly down from his seat and demanded briskly:

"What's up? What can I do to help?"

A great, relieved sigh fluttered from Mrs. Worth. Her incomparable smile seemed to be enveloping him and drawing him to her. At the moment it did not occur to William to wonder just why these pleasant things were happening.

"Everything!" the girl cried. "You see, I've been telephoning everywhere! You know all about such things, don't you?"

"Probably. I'm a real smart feller," the gentleman answered quite merrily. "What sort of things?"

"Moving vans—and how to get them!"

"It sounds like the title of somebody's pamphlet," William commented just as merrily. "You're craving one just now? This version of the American flag without the stars happens not to be mine." She had the cutest little ears—except June's—that he had ever seen. "Tell you: call up the office again and ask for Ambrose Little, my partner. He knows more about movers than I do, and he'll fix you up in a jiffy. So now, sorry as I am to tear myself away, I'll have to run along and—"

"Oh, but you mustn't go yet!" Mrs. Worth gasped. "You don't understand at all. There isn't a soul that I can get, don't you see? I've called up everybody, and they're all busy to-day."

"And it's to-day that you have to move?"

"I have to move this morning!"

SHE gazed up at William. She fairly vibrated distress.

Mr. Gwynn nodded his sympathy. "Well, one morning's as good as another for moving when—"

"But it *isn't!*" the girl insisted with quite exquisite violence, and stamped her foot. "You see—oooh!"

"What's wrong?" William cried.

"The—the thunder. I'm afraid of it," Mrs. Worth explained, and drew nearer to William, where naturally enough she was in much less danger. "You see, we've been renting this house, and it was sold last week to—to the meanest old creature."

"I don't remember any house down this way being sold last week."

"Well, this one was, and he has been just beastly about it. He said that one o'clock to-day was the very last minute he'd give us to get out—and it's long after eleven now. I was so alone and so frightened," said Mrs. Worth. "And then *you* came."

William nodded bland appreciation of this one. "Glad I did. Where's your husband?"

"At his office. He's so frightfully busy just now that he had to leave everything to me."

"Well, somebody has been bluffing him. Landlords can't get away with that—"

"No! Nobody bluffs Fred," the girl protested. "He saw his lawyers yesterday, and there's some trick clause in the lease. That man called up not an hour ago and told me he'd have three men here at one o'clock to put—put all my pretty things on the street!"

"Rot!" cried William Gwynn.

"It isn't! It's so!" the gorgeous little creature whimpered. "And if he does that, I'll die! I'll die of shame! Everybody will think that we've been —been evicted!"

She could go no further. Her lips trembled violently. Warm anger surged through William Gwynn, that suffering should have been brought to one so fair and helpless.

"Well, it's all nonsense, but it's exciting you just as much as if it were serious," he said soothingly. "I'll help, of course, and—"

"I *knew* you would!" the girl cried raptly up at him.

"And I'll see you through—so don't worry. I'll have to leave you for half an hour or so, but I'll rush back as soon as I've handed this fool van to its owner and then we'll—"

"What?" cried Mrs. Worth, and looked quickly from William to his van and back again. "But how can I move in it if you take it away?"

Gwynn blinked suddenly. He was dense to-day! So filled with his own affairs was his normally quick brain, that only now was the drift of Mrs. Worth's conversation penetrating.

"You weren't thinking of moving in *this*, were you?" he cried.

"But, of course!"

William blinked on, to more purpose. It was a sufficiently quaint conceit, to be sure; but it was nothing with which he cared at all to be involved. He, being a man, understood the pretty harmlessness of the wide-eyed, troubled girl before him. June, on the other hand, seemed to regard her as one of the more noisome forms of animal life—and that was enough.

"My child," he smiled, sparring, as they say, for time, "it can't be done. You haven't even a place to move into."

"What?" said Mrs. Worth, and the marvelous eyes clouded a little as she looked up trustfully. "Didn't I—I say that I'd rented another house yesterday?"

"And even if you did have—"

"But I'm telling you that I have!"

"Well, even so," Gwynn plodded on resolutely, "it takes strong men to load a houseful of furniture on a van. I'm fairly husky, but I'm not up to the job."

"OH, I thought of all those things," the girl assured him brightly. "It all flashed over me when I saw you coming down the street, just how you were going to save everything for me. See the men next door? The three who are unloading the bricks and things? They'll do it, if I ask them and pay them!"

"You haven't asked them already?" William said swiftly.

"No, but—"

"Don't! You see—er—men like that aren't used to handling furniture. They'd probably break everything you own. Anyhow, they'd have to refuse, whether they wanted to or not. They're doubtless union men."

There was something like compassion in the lady's smile.

"Oh, I don't believe that would make a bit of difference if *I* asked them." She laughed and sped away across the stretch of lawn.

Mr. Gwynn raised his voice in genuinely frightened protest. It did not carry or Mrs. Worth did not hear. Mr. Gwynn also scowled quite terribly as he prepared for a new shout; and then his voice died and the scowl became a smile, however grim. The way she twinkled across the green! She looked more like a fairy than like a grown woman full of terrific potentialities.

She was talking to them now, her

head tilted charmingly to one side, and they had suspended operations and removed their hats. At the very least, they were listening. From this distance it seemed to William that if smiles meant anything, the big one with the shaggy hair and the scar on his cheek, was swiftly turning into a drooling idiot!

Terror surged again through William Gwynn. No stretch of the imagination could make this trio look like men about to refuse a lady's simple request. And moving this load of furniture might take two hours—it might take three or four! At best, it meant that the afternoon would be well along before ever he reached the Grober establishment. It meant, more than anything else, that some time, in some way, June might hear of this bizarre adventure. Why, if he allowed Mrs. Worth to impose this asinine thing upon him, it might very easily wreck his whole life!

Just there Mrs. Worth turned and smiled at him. In the most inexplicable way, William found himself growing calm again. It really need not take three or four hours; with decent luck June really need never hear of it. But if she ever did—

William Gwynn glanced toward the driver's seat of the red-and-white-striped horror he had acquired so impulsively. A wave of splendid sanity surged down upon him, now. He'd just hop up there and start her going, and be two blocks away before Mrs. Worth had finished her siren discourse.

Explanations might come later on or never come at all; it was immaterial to William, just so that he got clear. He made one quick stride toward the seat; and then he stopped, for the fairylike little being was at his side again, breathless, red-cheeked, eyes glowing.

Indeed, for a flitting instant, as he looked into those eyes, Gwynn found himself faintly perplexed. The happiness was there, surely enough, but there was something else to which he could not quite put a name. Maybe it was just excitement; maybe it was triumph, which was natural enough; but this triumph seemed tinged with anger and malice and—bosh! There could be no malice in this fluttering elf!

Somewhere, three or four centuries back, there must have been a Sir William Gwynn, who went about with his helmet tucked full of little gloves and lacy handkerchiefs, and galloped his foaming charger and merrily poked long, sharp lances through the armor and persons of other gentlemen, that he might win the favor of this or that smiling damsel in the medieval grand stand. At all events, this surviving William—the rest of the world comfortably forgotten for the moment—beamed down appreciatively upon the little lady as she cried:

"Isn't it lovely! They'll do it! I'll have to stay in there and direct them, and you stay here and see that they load things nicely. Will you?"

"Why—why, yes! Yes, indeed!" Mr. Gwynn agreed.

Fairylike still, she sped to what had been her little home.

HE sighed sharply. It did beat the devil, but once she was out of sight the whole insane proposition seemed to loom up in its true colors and proportions. Time would be lost—Heaven knew how much time. And somebody might very easily see him standing there or see him later, driving an obviously loaded van, and even that would have to be explained at some length.

"Hey, ain't this Johnny Grober's

old hoodoo van?" the hairy workman demanded unexpectedly.

"Isn't it what?" William frowned.

"Why, sure it is! Certainly it is!" added the other, as he inspected again the wheels and the sides, and then grinned oddly. "Boss, you ain't bought this thing, have you?"

"I have not, but—"

"Lay off it, if you were thinking of buying it," the man advised, and lowered his voice and grew strangely earnest. "Right there is all the jinx you can get on four wheels, mister, and I don't mean maybe. No—on the level. I ain't kidding. How I know, my wife's cousin was working for Grober the time he bought it. Danny Rice—I guess you wouldn't know him.

"It seems the guy Grober bought this offen went nuts for no reason and blew his dome off, and some guy wisecracked that trying to run this was what drove him to it! Well, however that may be, Danny was laughing about it—this was the day Grober bought it—and, without no reason and the engine not running, she slid backward and socked Danny. He's in the hospital yet, and that's five months ago."

"Er—really?" murmured Mr. Gwynn, who could be uncomfortable even if he was not superstitious.

"The week following that," his informant pursued cheerily, "her brakes slipped and she went through a new limousine. That stood Grober a couple o' thousand to square, I understand. The week following that, the guy he had driving her fell off the seat and landed on his head. Dead when they picked him up! The week following that—"

"Never mind the other weeks!" William snapped. "That's all poppycock!"

"Sure it is!" agreed the hairy man. "I don't believe in them things myself. Only I wouldn't take it if it was give to me! Well, I guess the little lady's waiting," he concluded, and went off up the short pathway whistling.

Mr. Gwynn cleared his throat and stood some six feet farther from his vehicle, looking it over with slightly wary eye.

Poor old Dowd had gone down to bankruptcy, hadn't he? And, pressed for time as he was this day, nothing amazingly fortunate had happened to William since hurling himself into the van's stormy career. He moistened his lips; his smile became sly and peculiar. Perhaps, even now, it might not be too late to—oh, yes, it was! Mrs. Worth was running down the path once more, to reach a gleaming stop before him.

"OH, it's just better and better!" she announced. "Two of them worked for years moving furniture and they know all about it!"

"They do?" murmured William.

The gleaming effect, as the lady continued to gaze up at him, became a blinding glare. Anger simmered suddenly within William. What kind of a man could it be, to have married all this youth and beauty and then to have abandoned it at a time like this?

"Oh, you've just done everything for me!" the girl cried.

"Tush!" said William.

"But you have! You—why, you don't know what you're doing for me. You haven't an idea, really!"

"My dear child!" Gwynn protested.

"*Blam!*" said a peal of thunder.

"Ooh!" screamed Mrs. Worth and jumped close to her savior; and then, without shame, explained shakily: "I'm—so silly about thunderstorms! I just—oh, I don't know—"

"This isn't going to be much of a storm," William said soothingly, although the sun had disappeared now and the skies were growing more ominously black with every second.

"I'm not afraid if—if some one's with me," Mrs. Worth explained. "Not so much afraid, I mean."! And her brief fright having apparently passed, she smiled quite mischievously up at William with: "Everybody, last night, called you 'Bill'."

"Why don't you?" that person grinned, with accustomed readiness.

"It would be so much nicer! I'm Donna," the girl dimpled.

"That's a pretty name," William agreed. "But not half so pretty as the—"

This bright thought he bit squarely in two. But Donna, evidently, had not heard. Her eyes were shining now toward the house and the oncoming hairy man, who bore a serving table on his back and a dining room chair in either hand.

"Oh, I'm so glad we're moving!" she cried. "Just like this—just now! Aren't you?"

William did not answer. His attention, too, had wandered suddenly from the girl and the van and the approaching thunderstorm and from everything else save the pretty gray roadster, rolling along the street, almost opposite them now.

In it sat a girl who seemed to be looking directly at William. This was not unusual, for William was a handsome brute. What made her stare so interesting was that the face from which it came belonged to Dolly Parks, June Stannard's very closest friend—aye, the same Dolly Parks who was to have been her maid of honor next week.

And, as if the moment needed further embellishment, the golden-haired Donna Worth must needs select it to cry in her high, clear, carrying soprano:

"Bill! If I'm glad, aren't you glad, too, that we're moving?"

CHAPTER VI.

A NOT SO INNOCENT BYSTANDER.

THE senior partner of Gwynn & Little turned to solid ice.

It was all over, even now. Dolly, whose hearing was excellent, must have caught every word of that, must have caught as well the intonation which, to one who knew nothing of the truth, must surely have suggested that this household moving was a joint affair in which William had his part!

So, still frozen, he waited for the stare of thunderstruck contempt which must come from June's friend. She would hardly stop and ask questions; she was not that sort. But she would make a swift survey of the whole incredible scene and then put on speed and head for the Stannard home. Well, he couldn't blame her. In the same circumstances he would have done as much for a close man friend and—

William thawed suddenly around the edges, as it were. It could not be; yet Dolly Parks, wrapped in thoughts of her own, had been looking at him without ever seeing him! At this very moment she was twenty feet along, her expression unchanged; and now she was fifty feet along and, without a backward glance, giving her full attention to the street intersection. He was saved!

"Bill! Aren't you?" Donna repeated coaxingly.

"I—what? Yep—yes!" William muttered.

Astonishingly, in that little space, all the unworthy, roseate clouds had been swept from his brain! He saw what seemed, at the moment, to be the truth: a pretty, wheedling little flirt, which was Donna—a somewhat boneheaded individual, much too susceptible to pretty little flirts, which was himself.

Internally, he swore quite freely. He'd let himself in for this fool business and now he'd have to go through with it; but indulgent Fate had given him a sharp, clear warning. This would be about the snappiest moving in Downford's history. He turned back to Donna, meaning to scowl impressively and tell her just how snappy the moving was to be. Instead, he met her gaze, and smiled almost benignly.

"I mean that—er—of course I'm glad, if you are," was what he said. "Shall I go in and speed them up?"

"You don't look very glad."

"But I am!"

The great pleading eyes seemed to search his soul. William smiled on, more widely, less worthily.

"Really—Bill?"

"You bet!" Mr. Gwynn cried.

"Then that's all right, and I'll go in and speed them up myself," said Mrs. Worth with, peculiarly enough, the air of one who has accomplished something definitely satisfactory.

In point of fact, William observed presently, they were speeding things up pretty well on their own account. They were trotting back and forth now, burdened down. Mr. Gwynn stepped along the side of the van, well out of view of other passing motorists, and examined the skies rather grimly. Whether Donna knew it or not, there was a fine chance that her pretty things were due for a thorough soaking about the time they were unloaded at the other end of this idiot ride.

William, the lady being absent, shrugged. He wasn't interested in her things; he proved it within the minute when the hairy man, near the van's door, exclaimed:

"My good gosh! How'd that happen?"

"How did what happen?"

"The spindly legs on this here table, boss. One of 'em busted clean off when I shoved her in just then and—"

"Well, never mind it! Never mind it!" William barked unfeelingly. "Get your load on!"

Three-quarters an hour later it was on. Beads stood upon William's brow, and the back of an antique chair was gone and the glass from a quaint little bookcase; but the load was on and apparently nobody had seen William Gwynn.

Up there by the house Mrs. Worth, an entrancing figure in her ultra-modish coat and tight little hat, conversed with her men and used up time—minute after minute! Now she was coming toward him, glittering as before.

"NOW we can start!" she stated.

"Yes—sure!" William said.

"You have a car, of course?"

"Freddie has it."

"Then we'll have to find you a taxi!" William muttered, and turned feverish eyes toward the street. "Just a minute and—"

"But why can't I ride up on the van with you?" Donna asked blankly.

"What? How would you look up—"

"Why, I don't know. Let's see!" the lady laughed, and stepped lightly up to the seat. "There! You tell me how I look?"

"Like a million dollars!" her knight conceded, with a grudging smile. "But that's hardly the place for—"

"Oh, Bill! Don't you think we could start now? See how tired the neighbors must be, watching us all this time."

Mr. Gwynn gazed about him rather wildly. Unquestionably, three ladies on three porches were staring fixedly at them; as unquestionably, curtains rustled on four different windows as people stood back.

"Well—all right!" William choked, as he climbed to his place behind the wheel.

A devilishly edifying picture they must make, he reflected with great heat. An irresponsible young couple, caught short in their moving arrangements, might have done something like this. But for a presumably respectable married woman and a man who was to enter the matrimonial state at seven this evening . . .

"Isn't it hard to start?" Mrs. Worth asked interestedly.

"Very. You'd better take a taxi and—"

"No! No! Please don't make me do that," the girl said quickly. "You see, I want to stay with you because—oh, dear! That—that awful lightning! Bill, it's silly, but I'm—I'm so scared when it's like this that I just—just lose my reason. I can't be alone in a taxi!"

"All right," Mr. Gwynn answered gently, and wrestled on with starter and choke and hand throttle. "There! There she goes at last! Now, where to?"

"Straight ahead," sighed the girl.

"And?"

"And what?"

"Well, the location of this new house of yours isn't a secret, is it?" William laughed.

"No, but—*ouch!*" squealed Donna, and clutched his arm and held fast. "Oh! That thunder was frightful! Bill, just—just go on before it gets any worse, and I'll tell you where to turn and—oh dear!"

William drove on. The poor little kid was pretty much upset by the storm, eh? He cocked an eye skyward again. Perhaps she had reason to be upset; it looked like an energetic storm and it had at last made up its mind and would be upon Downford in a matter of minutes. He glanced back, too.

"The men will be there before we are, eh?"

"What men, Bill?" The girl shivered.

"The men who loaded the van, of course. They're going to unload it, aren't they?"

"Oh, they couldn't come," Donna explained. "They were sorry, but they had their other work to do, Bill. I just paid them off."

"Well, do you think this thing 'll unload itself? Do you think I can—"

"You—you needn't be mean to me, Bill!" the helpless little creature cried, and her full lips were trembling. "I've had a lot of trouble and I'm all excited."

"I know. Excuse me. Only—well, we'll find some one."

"Why, of course we'll find some one," Donna agreed comfortably. "I'll find some one. I can make people do things for me, Bill."

"I know you can," sighed William Gwynn, as he rumbled onward.

He smiled rather wickedly up at the clouds, which were swerving into position for real business now. He glowered at the bright red hood ahead—and the motor sputtered viciously and stopped for an instant. Finally it decided to carry on a little farther.

He glanced up in search of curtains, and there they were, sure enough, clumsily rolled and tattered; well, if

they didn't shut out much rain, at least they'd shut out the interested stares of passers-by.

"I'll put these down before it starts," he said briefly. "Then—"

"Yes, she *is* trying to attract your attention," Donna said softly.

"Who is?"

"This girl in the gray roadster right beside us! She's been rolling like that for a block or more, just looking up at you. See her?"

WILLIAM turned and saw her. He started and stiffened and the roots of his hair prickled and his heart thudded in the most astonishing way. William then bobbed his head in the most informal sort of bow—and Miss Dolly Parks, nodding ever so slightly, continued to look up at him in the same cool, steady way.

Where had she come from? What did she want? She wanted something, if it was only the sight of William up here; and once sure that her eyes were not playing tricks, she'd hurry to June and— Mr. Gwynn, with sudden determination, drew up to the curb and stopped short. Miss Parks, after one glance over her shoulder, also drew up to the curb some fifty feet ahead.

"Oh, but—Bill!" Donna protested. "Must you take time to talk to her now, whoever she is?"

"You stay there!" William said, shortly enough, as he trotted forward.

They were old friends, of course, Dolly Parks and he; yet Dolly had no bright smile to answer his.

"Hello, Dot! I—"

"Will! Is this just a flirtation or—er—something a great deal worse?"

"It's neither one. Don't you see—when you passed, a while ago—"

"Yes, that was curious," the crisp, chilly voice interrupted, and the eyes went on considering William with a mixture of loathing and blank wonder. "I was thinking of other things—and then I heard *her* say: 'Aren't you glad we're moving, Bill?' Still, it didn't register until I was past the next corner. Then I looked back, and I couldn't tell whether it was you—and so I went on—but I just had to turn around and come back when I finished my errand. And it *was* you!"

"No denying it!" Mr. Gwynn tried to smile. "You see—"

"Wait a minute, please. Your affairs really don't interest me, Will, but this is all so—so extremely queer, to find you and an utterly unsuspected lady moving your household effects—er—by hand, as it were! June is my dearest friend, Will. She might actually have married you if I hadn't come back and seen—all this!"

"Why, what do you think 'all this' is, anyway?" Mr. Gwynn cried, rather wildly.

"What else can it be? It's absolutely incredible, of course, that you've been able to keep such an affair under cover so far; but one might almost conclude that you were moving your lady and your furniture to a more remote spot before the wedding, and that the spot is so very private that you're attending to the details yourself!"

"I never thought that—that—" William said huskily. "Dolly! Will you listen to me for just two minutes?"

"Not more than that," shrugged Miss Parks. "And don't make the story too quaint."

However, she was smiling when he had finished his pell-mell recital. She was also shaking her head in sheer wonder.

"You let her vamp you into this?"

"Put it that way if you like, Dolly. I—I wanted to help her. And, Dot,

about June: She—er—wouldn't understand."

"And so I'm not to tell June a word about it?"

"I wish you wouldn't," William said.

Some little time, Miss Parks gazed pensively at the thermometer on her instrument board, presently to smile rather differently at William.

"Billy, you'll dump this blonde and her lares and things at her new home and that, cross your heart, is the last you'll see of her?"

"It is!"

"All right, then. I'll make a bargain with you. I'm out this morning gathering funds for our Fresh Air work and collections are pretty rotten. So, rather than go back with an empty pocket, I'll agree to keep my mouth shut for—well, let's see—for one hundred dollars."

"You mean, I'll put my name down for that?" William said, readily. "Not—er—cash?"

"Oh, this is a cash transaction and I'd say that it was worth a lot more," Miss Parks responded sweetly. "You see, I'm making a horrible compromise with my conscience in doing it at all. Of course, if you don't want to help the good work—"

"But I do! I want to help!" William corrected hastily, and his hand dived for his pocket.

"And here's a little jewel of thought for you to cherish, Billy," Miss Parks added soberly, when she had snapped her purse shut again. "I'm accepting all you've told me as the simple truth—and simple's a mild word, if it is the truth. But," she added, and paused impressively, "if there's really more behind the affair and I ever hear of it, all bets are off, conscience wins out and, so far as Junie is concerned, you're sunk!"

"Yes, Dot," William muttered, as he bowed and hurried back to his great red-and-white moving van.

ALTHOUGH Donna glowed exquisitely for him, William did not bound to her side with any great, glad cry. Twenty per cent of his poor little nest-egg was rolling away in Miss Parks's pocketbook, and along with it had gone at least ninety-eight per cent of his half-admitted appreciation of Donna Worth.

"Who was the girl?" she began brightly.

"Friend of mine. Had to speak to her. Sorry," clicked from Mr. Gwynn, as he fought the engine back to life. "Now! Where's the house we're heading for, please?"

"*Isn't* that old engine cranky, though?" Mrs. Worth breathed.

"What? Yes. Where—"

"Oh!" the girl screamed. "*Oh!*"

"That wasn't thunder; that was a backfire," William explained, through gritting teeth. "Now, where—"

"Well, *that* was thunder!" Donna quivered.

All jerks and spittings notwithstanding, Mr. Gwynn had his odd vehicle away from the curb again and rolling onward. He glanced down at Donna with growing concern. What the Sam Hill was the matter with her, anyhow? She didn't look just ordinarily frightened. She was pressing close to him, clinging to his arm, looking up at him with great, terrified eyes... The fat man, there on the sidewalk, was laughing his astonishment at them, and so, less approvingly, had been the very thin woman who leaned out of the taxi for a better view.

This was Greenfield Avenue, too, where any minute another good friend of June's might happen along.

"Oh, forget the storm!" William said quite roughly. "It's not going to hurt you. You'll have to tell me where we're going, Mrs. Worth—"

"Oh! I thought it was Donna?"

"Donna, then—or I can't very well go there. You see, traffic is pretty thick here and I want to get off the avenue as soon as possible. So give me the address and—"

"We can't get there with the engine stopped, can we?" Mrs. Worth laughed.

"What?"

"Or hasn't it? Is it just running quietly now?"

"It—no, the blasted thing's quit again!" William snarled and edged back to the curb. "I wish this da—I wish this engine was in—oh, my Lord!"

Donna, noting his sudden purple flush, his suddenly shaking hands, looked up inquiringly.

"I *have* to get it started now," Mr. Gwynn chattered astonishingly. "Only—only let go of me and give me room and—turn your face the other way, will you?"

His voice failed. The red lips parted in amazement.

"Do you think I'll scare your old engine by looking at it?"

"No—not that! Not that!" William laughed wildly, senselessly, and jammed and jammed again at the starter. "Never—mind. You wouldn't understand."

But William understood!

It was the house beside them that had brought him to this distressing state—the big white house at the head of the wide flight leading up the terraces—the house, in fine, of B. Wilfred Stannard, brother of Henry, uncle of June! Why the accursed van must pick just this spot for pausing, passed human comprehension. William, too, had intended to turn off the avenue before they came within two blocks of this one.

Somewhere behind that lordly limestone front was B. Wilfred himself, who had retired from active business and was forever pottering about—and his hawk-nosed, hawk-eyed little wife, who quite frankly disapproved of William Gwynn—and, still further, Mary, the highly acidulated housekeeper, who lugged around a fixed spite against the whole world, and also a couple of maids whom William could not remember having tipped on any occasion. When one or more of these glanced out of a window and espied the gaudy thing that was at the gates of the mansion...

"ISN'T that the accelerator you're pressing all this time?" asked Mrs. Worth, who was by way of being quite a little mechanic. "It looks just like the accelerator on our car."

"It—it—yes, it is!" William frothed. "You see, I'm sort of—well, here's the starter, anyway. Here's the starter! This ought to do it!"

The starter whirred and ground. The engine itself maintained a deep, discreet silence. Mrs. Worth watched attentively, her lovely brow now contracted in thought Mrs. Worth returned to the style of glittering at which she was so adept and once again gripped William's arm.

"I know!" she cried. "You can't get it started at all, can you?"

"Not—yet!" William confessed.

"I know how to get it going!" said the lady and, albeit she cast one brief, terror-stricken glance at the lowering skies, she stepped unhesitatingly from van to sidewalk.

Mr. Gwynn suddenly passed boiling point and kept on growing warmer.

"Here! Don't try anything like that!" he cried fiercely. "You can't possibly repair it. Don't lift that hood and start monkeying or we'll have a crowd around us in one minute!"

"I'm not entirely crazy, Bill. Don't you see the big house up there?"

"D'ye suppose I can see anything else?" William gasped out at her in the silliest way. "Yes, I see it, but—"

"Well, look, Bill. Their garage! The doors wide open and both cars in! There's almost certainly at least one chauffeur around."

"Eh?" William said huskily.

"So I'm going in and borrow their chauffeur for a few minutes!" the girl said brightly, and started for the steps.

A certain freezing calm that had been descending upon William Gwynn as he wrestled with the problem of getting the lady back to her seat without dragging her up bodily, now departed suddenly. But that it was a rather tight fit, his hat must have shot straight into the air before the force of his rising hair.

CHAPTER VII.

ADRIFT IN THE STORM.

AMBROSE LITTLE pushed back his indispensable telephone. His countenance, just then, was quite a study. Contrition was there and even shame.

"I've just been talking to Stevenson, of Etheridge & Stevenson," he told Miss Duncan, his sheepish smile persisting. "He'd been over trying to collect some money from Dowd, too. It seems that Dowd's gone into bankruptcy, but Bill took the van and is driving it back to Grober himself, to make sure the ugly rat gets it and that our skirts are cleared . . . Hum."

With William or any one else in the office, it was the habit of the rather precise Ambrose to regard Miss Duncan as a stenographer. When they were alone like this now and then he found himself able to regard her as a fellow human being. So Ambrose grinned frankly and ruefully in the girl's direction.

"I suppose I've been kind of low, all through this," he mused. "But I've been rather exasperated, seeing Bill so much in love that he seemed to be forgetting everything else. I've known plenty of people in love who didn't carry on like that!"

Miss Duncan also sighed, although sympathetically.

"Perhaps they were not as much in love as Mr. Gwynn is," she suggested. "Oh, isn't there *somebody* we can borrow from?" and the girl clasped her hands.

It was growing a bit too intimate. Mr. Little ceased his smiling and reached again for his telephone.

"It's just possible there is," he said, unemotionally. "My aunt may be home by this time, and she's a pretty good sort." But conscience sent another wave over him just then and he glanced guiltily at the girl. "Gosh! Me sitting here and thinking all sorts of unkind things about him—and Bill over there talking his head off to Grober, trying to smooth everything over and wasting his time!" he muttered, with no particular point. "Hello, there! Operator!"

IN part, though, he was wrong: Bill was not yet talking to Grober.

Bill, at the moment, was just tilting on the edge of the apoplectic state, for Mrs. Worth, with the blithest and most reassuring wave of her little hand, was heading up the steps in earnest—and

in a moment she'd ring and the door would open, and it was no unusual thing for B. Wilfred Stannard himself to answer that bell.

"*Hey!*" shouted William Gwynn.

"Oh!" cried Donna, but she did stop. "Did you call?"

"I—yes! She's started!"

"The engine?"

"Yes, the engine!" William roared. "Come on! We'll start now before anything else can happen. Come on! Come on!"

"Well, I'm coming," Donna said mildly. "You needn't scream. In fact, I'm here."

"Yes, I—I see you are, and I didn't mean to scream," Gwynn babbled. "And now, if you'll just get up here quick? That's the idea!"

The strangest and most pleasing thing, of course, was that the engine really had resumed operations.

As to just when and how this had happened, William knew nothing and cared less. Enough that the bedeviled machinery banged and rattled once more, and that no soul had appeared at a window of the B. Wilfred Stannard home.

"It's—it's funny!" she said rather shakily.

"What's funny about it?"

"I didn't mean all this. I meant about people, and how you can be mistaken in them when you don't know them very well. I thought last night that you were so—so solid and imperturbable, and that nothing could ever worry or excite you, Bill. That's why I tried to get you to help me this morning, you know. But you're twittery as a nervous old maid!"

"There are reasons!" William exploded. "I have things to attend to to-day and all this damn—"

"Oh! I'm using up time you want for something else?" Donna cried, and her voice thinned out pathetically, suggesting the voice of a child who has been unjustly slapped.

Inadvertently, William glanced at her. Pretty? No, she wasn't just pretty; she was a perfect panic for looks!

"No! No! It's quite all right," he said. "We'll get this over as soon as possible, and I'll run along. That's all. Don't worry about it for a second. But I haven't found out even yet where we're going, have I?" he laughed, genially enough. "Just where is this new house of yours, Donna?"

"Bill! It isn't possible that that engine's dying *again*, is it?"

"If it is, we'll discover where we're heading first and attend to the engine afterward. So—"

"It is! It's dead!"

"Well—yes, it is!" Mr. Gwynn mumbled hoarsely, and steered back to the curb in the fashion at which he was growing quite expert. Also, he passed a hand over his heated brow for an instant. The thing was growing all but nightmarish. They'd covered a scant two blocks that time, and now they were standing still again and Donna was saying:

"My, you know just everybody in this town, don't you?"

"Why?" Gwynn grunted.

"Your friend's looking at you and waiting."

"What? What friend?" said William Gwynn. "There's no—"

But there he stopped, cut short on the perfectly true statement that no friend of his was about. For Sam Pennell certainly was no friend—Sam, standing just ahead there by his racy little coupé; slant-eyed, super-shrewd Sam Pennell, a youngish lawyer of the lower stratum who was not yet in jail, but, to many people's way of thinking,

due to land there almost any minute. Once, so they said, the district attorney had all but dropped his hook into Sam. On another occasion the chief of police had issued a statement about what he meant to do to Sam—and later had retracted.

MR. PENNELL nodded sharp invitation for him to advance and confer—and William advanced.

Oh, it was maddening enough, wasting on this slimy insect time so urgently demanded by his borrowed engine; but it was better than ignoring him and chancing the version of the affair that Pennell's tongue might well broadcast.

"Morning, Pennell!" he said shortly.

"The same to you, Gwynn," the attorney grinned. "Gone into the trucking business, I see."

"Hardly," William smiled and explained briskly, crisply and with a prodigiously casual effect, as one might explain an annoying little joke on an acquaintance, touching merely the high spots of the situation and quite omitting the personal angles. Rendered thus, in some uncanny way the whole thing sounded bare and unconvincing; even to William it sounded like a glib, prepared story. Mr. Pennell pushed back his hat and scratched his head, for he was frankly puzzled.

"That's the funniest one I've heard in a long time," he submitted. "In this whole city, your little friend couldn't get any one she was willing to have move her—only just you?"

"Not a soul! And she's not my friend, by the way."

"No? The way she was hanging on to you when you came along, she didn't look like an enemy, Gwynn."

"She's—er—afraid of thunder and lightning."

"Oh? That's all there is to it, hey? Well, I have to hand it to you for taste, kid!"

"I tell you—" William snarled savagely.

"No need to get excited, feller," Pennell said. "Listen, Gwynn. Give me the low-down on this; maybe I can help you?"

"You have it now, and I don't need any help."

"You can't tell," the lawyer insisted. "I've handled queerer stuff than this and delivered the money's worth, Gwynn. Come clean! You're taking the jane somewhere and, at a guess, you've really got your furniture in back there. Only, if things are so bad you have to do the job yourself—"

"Do you know," William interrupted sweetly, "I think I'm going to knock your damned block off, just for luck?"

"It'd be an awful dumb play, Gwynn," said Mr. Pennell. "The fool thing most fellows do when they get in a queer jam like this—and I admit, on the level, I can't quite dope out this one myself—they lose their heads and want to sock somebody. You need some good advice."

Now William sneered at him, with the curling lips of the righteous, unafraid man. Mr. Pennell, after shrewd study of this exceptionally high-grade sneer, smiled a baffled smile.

"You have me stopped; I admit that," he murmured. "Say, you *are* the guy that's going to marry old man Stannard's girl, aren't you?"

If William did not answer in words, he did as well with his sudden start and his angry flush. Pennell smiled sagely. "Well, so long, Gwynn. Maybe the old man 'll get a laugh out of this, even if I can't. I was just on my way up to see him. Maybe if he doesn't, his daughter will."

"What old man are you talking about?" William barked.

"What's that? Stannard, of course. Henry Stannard. I've got some business with him and—"

"You're a liar!" William cried violently. "You never did any business with Henry Stannard, and you never will!"

"The last part of it's wrong, anyhow," Pennell said smoothly. "I have a suspicion he'll slip me something for this news."

Mr. Gwynn had gripped and gripped at himself; he felt able to speak now. "All right, Pennell," he said hoarsely. "I'm being shaken down good and proper. It was my mistake, talking to you at all, and—"

"Oh, I wouldn't call that a mistake," the lawyer smiled sweetly.

"—And I'll have to pay cash for it. Pennell, I'll hand you one hundred dollars to forget you ever saw me here like this."

"You'll hand me what?" the attorney gasped angrily.

"One—"

"Yes, and five hundred, and it ought to be a thousand!" Mr. Pennell informed him, with great warmth. "What kind of a piker do you think I am, Gwynn? You, marrying a girl that 'll have a couple of millions pretty soon, and you have the crust to offer me one hundred dollars!" He paused, swallowing his honest rage. "Let it go at that! We'll call it five yards, but you better come across quick with that. You got me mad now. Don't take too many chances."

HE faced William unflinchingly, with a very ugly smile. William did his best to smile back in a fashion just as ugly, if not a shade uglier; but internally he was turning to mush. He was trapped. Here, to be sure, was a malignant growth on fair Downford, and sooner or later it would be excised and transplanted into a neat cell in the State prison. But in the meantime it was loose in all its malignancy.

"I can't raise five hundred," said William desperately.

"No?" mused Mr. Pennell, and, after a last long inspection of William, seemed suddenly to lose all interest in the proposition. "Well, old man Stannard 'll probably have a couple of dollars to spend, if it 'll save his daughter from disaster. 'By!"

He glanced boredly at the sky and buttoned his coat.

"Pennell! I'll give you four hundred dollars, and that's the last cent I have!" Gwynn cried suddenly, even before he knew that he was about to say it.

Mr. Pennell arched his brows.

"That's not so much, when you come to think—"

"Well, you'll take it and keep your damned mouth shut forever, or I'll smash you into little pieces here and now and risk the consequences!" vibrated astonishingly from William.

"At that, I'm no hog," the lawyer said quickly. "Come through!"

An instant, as he fumbled in his pocket, William glanced back at Donna, and as he glanced the very strangest impulses surged through him. Ever a quiet and law-abiding citizen, with a respect for women that was almost quaintly old-fashioned, he still sensed mistily the mad delights one might glean in snatching limb from limb a smallish woman of the blond type. This horrid phase passed within the second, to be sure, but it left him a little weaker and breathing heavily.

Mr. Pennell tipped his hat perfunc-

torily to Mrs. Worth, stepped into his coupé, and sped away. Even then Gwynn did not trudge the little distance back to the van, for his feet had turned to lead.

It was gone now, his five hundred dollars. Sweet charity had taken a little of it, vice unashamed had taken four times as much. Financially speaking, he was just where he had been on leaving the Stannard home with June's ultimatum: he still had his six dollars.

"Oh, see what I've—" Donna began gayly, and stopped short to cry: "Why, what's the matter, Bill? Why are you glaring at me like that?"

"Say," thundered Mr. Gwynn, "if you knew—"

"Have I—done something?" Donna faltered, with that same slapped child effect.

A moment William found himself rather giddy; then things in general settled down again, heavily, soddenly.

"You—no, I guess not," he muttered, as he climbed back to the seat.

"Look, Bill, while you were gone I started the engine all by myself!"

"Did you? Good enough," William grunted unappreciatively, and swung away from the curb, glowering ominously ahead at street and storm and passing vehicles alike. Gone! The whole five hundred dollars, gone. He laughed with surpassing bitterness and drove viciously toward a taxicab, bringing curses from its driver; for an instant he even considered taking a wheel off the bakery wagon just ahead, out of sheer spite.

"Well, *now* we'll make short work of the rest of this trip!" said William Gwynn. "We'll—say! That was a whamdinger, wasn't it?"

"Oh, that was awful!" Donna shrieked. "Did it hit us?"

"It didn't hit anywhere in the neighborhood," William said shortly as he recovered himself. "But it's coming down in earnest now and—"

"I see it and—and we're outdoors in it and—oh, I'm so afraid that I can't—"

"Don't be!" William snapped brutally enough. "Forget the storm and tell me where we're going."

"What, Bill?" the girl asked dazedly.

"I said, tell me where we're going! We're going somewhere, are we not? We're going to the new house you've rented."

The girl looked up quite blankly. She certainly was scared all the way through now. Her lately pink cheeks had gone white and her eyes were great pools of overwhelming terror. Her lips trembled as she tried in vain to shape words.

"Just where," William said, slowly and distinctly, "is—this—house?"

"I—don't know, Bill!" said the girl.

"You—what's that?"

"No, I don't know! I haven't the slightest idea where it is! I've absolutely forgotten!"

CHAPTER VIII.

A PERILOUS REFUGE.

A GREAT raindrop splashed against the windshield; two more landed upon William's knee. The lightning picked just that moment to knock the steeple from the Second Presbyterian Church, eight blocks away, and there was a deafening report as that happened. But still William could only continue his stare at Donna.

"You don't understand at all, Bill," the girl explained. "It's the—the storm. I'm always—always—oh, I

don't know, but there was a dreadful one when I was just a little bit of a thing and I was so frightened that I dropped—dropped senseless, Bill! They had a fearful time bringing me around again and the very first thing I remember is screaming at the doctor to—to take it away! I mean, to take away the storm and—"

"Hold on!" William urged quietly, albeit he was turning chillier and chillier with every second. "There's something you're trying to tell me. Just what is it?"

"Why, that whenever there is a storm like this, I—I just lose myself, Bill. I lose my memory and everything. I almost lose my reason! I—I feel as if I was losing it now!"

Mr. Gwynn swallowed hard and squeezed her hand.

"Well, this is no place to lose your reason—not out here," he said firmly. "Just take hold of yourself. The sooner you remember, the sooner we'll be under cover. Now, then!" said William and transfixed her with a compelling, hypnotic smile. "What is that address?"

"I don't know, Bill," Donna sighed.

Mr. Gwynn ceased his swallowing and his hypnotic smiling and bit his lips. Just what did one do now? At least, one didn't stop trying.

"Probably I can help you to remember," he said smoothly. "Was it one of those cute stucco houses on Walker Street?"

Mrs. Worth threw out her little pink hands.

"I've *forgotten!*" she cried tremulously.

"You said that before," William muttered. Was he to drive on and on forever through this accursed storm?

"I'll take you to one of your friends and we'll leave this devilish van outside, and when the storm's over you can remember where you live and get some one to drive it there—and I'll send for it afterward. You haven't forgotten your friends, too, have you?" Mr. Gwynn demanded.

"I haven't any to forget," Donna explained. "We've lived in your beastly old town for just two weeks and we haven't been anywhere until that—that wretched party last night!" She instantly subsided to a mournful: "I don't know a soul!"

"Well, I do!" cried the indomitable William, in his desperation. "I've got a second cousin who lives out this way and we'll go there and—"

"I won't!"

"Why not?"

"Because I don't want to! I won't make a nuisance of myself in your second cousin's home! I won't go!"

Mr. Gwynn glanced down at her again. Now, at least, she was on the verge of tears and possibly on the verge of hysterics. Now, when he had delivered a few more sharp remarks, she might begin to screech and grow quite irresponsible! She looked fully capable of it just then.

"Can we get in touch with your husband by telephone?" William inquired thickly.

It seemed to him that Mrs. Worth started a little, although the thunder might have accounted for that.

"What—what for?"

"Well, naturally, to find out where you live and what he wants me to do with you and your furniture, my child," Mr. Gwynn said, with his most reassuring smile. "He has an office in town here, of course?"

"He isn't there now," the girl said impatiently. "I'm all shaken up, but I'm not an imbecile, Bill. I'd have called him myself, but he—he had to

take the noon train down to New York."

William gulped, just once more.

"Then what do you, yourself, want me to do—" he began wildly, and then instinctively ducked his head.

There had been a blistering flash of light that blinded William completely for the moment and brought a piercing scream from his companion, and in the same second there had been a crash beside which the frequently mentioned Crack of Doom might have sounded like the creaking of a small chair.

At the far end of this block a fine old tree shivered for an instant and sent off splinters like so much spray; then with a grinding roar full half of it came down to the sidewalk, and white faces peered from several windows. Water pounded down on the little roof above the driver's seat; more water splashed up around them and still more drove in through the windshield.

"Isn't there somewhere we can get out of the storm—oh, Bill, just somewhere?" the girl implored.

"You bet there is!" cried Mr. Gwynn, with an abrupt heartiness, and pushed the accelerator down to the floor.

For there was, of course, in a dire emergency like this. On the books of Gwynn & Little any number of vacant houses were listed for sale or rent, and his skeleton keys would open one or all of them. Another precious half hour would be wasted waiting for the cloudburst to pass, oh, well! There was no use now in groaning over that phase of the situation. William sent darting glances toward the houses of Greenfield Avenue and up the side streets; the bright green and orange sign of Gwynn & Little was markedly absent. Odd; they certainly hadn't sold or rented everything in this part of town lately—but then, he hadn't been keeping very closely in touch with things.

At least he was sure of Mrs. Ringley's house. Nobody on earth would ever rent that hole; a dozen agents had it and not one of them ever bothered to show it. More, it was just ahead, ordinarily a blot upon Greenfield Avenue, but turned now to a blessed haven of refuge.

William slowed down with a sigh of relief and stared at the shabby place—stared and then rolled on again, for there were curtains at the windows now and at least two frowzy children were looking out and watching the storm.

"Bill! I'm getting so wet! Isn't there some—"

"I'm trying to find it," Gwynn said shortly.

It was possible, to be sure, to head north and make for the new Hillis Park development; there were dozens of empty houses over that way. But it was all of ten blocks and they'd have to take the storm on Donna's side and— Strangely, William suddenly snarled aloud and drove straight ahead through the storm.

Very well! If he had to do it, he had to do it, that was all! For five minutes or more, he had been pushing the thought resolutely from his brain, but the fact remained that, now just around the next corner, stood that exquisitely dainty bit of small-house architecture that was so shortly to be June's new home and his own domicile as well.

Aye, he could see the red roof of the little gem from here and his faithful heart thumped joyously for several seconds. There was the dove-cote given them—or to be given them in a formal

way when they were married—by good old Henry Stannard; and he was under no delusions as to what June would say to her affianced's bringing a hated blonde to the premises.

But it was that or risk pneumonia for both of them, or even drowning, if things grew more violent! William shuddered and then scowled at his own nerves. A little bit jealous June might be, but she wasn't an idiot. In fact, if she knew about this, she'd be the first one to urge them into the house and under cover. William Gwynn, with another of the peculiar growls that were causing Donna to gaze up in new and mystified concern, yanked at his wheel, bumped and splashed through a teeming gutter, rocked quite perilously as he turned once more, this time into the drive, and finally stopped with a short:

"You stay here till I get the side door open."

The first key did it.

William stepped in and sighed as the pleasant smell of new wood and new varnish was wafted to him. Honestly, just as a matter of sentiment, he hated like sin to do this—hated even to enter the perfect little establishment with any woman save June herself! Foolish, of course, considering this emergency, but it did seem like downright desecration.

Rain slashed at the windows. William, failing even to hear it, sighed again, deliciously and at great length, and still gazed through the tiny side corridor by the kitchen, at all that lay beyond. The lovely dining room, and the stairs, curved so deftly. There was a little landing, halfway up where they turned, and, somehow William knew, when he lounged in one of the big chairs they had already ordered and June went upstairs for something, she'd pause on that landing and smile down on him—

"Bill!" filtered to him out of the storm. "Oh, Bill!"

Mr. Gwynn stiffened angrily. Of course, he'd have to bring her in and let her stay till the rain let up, but emphatically there would be no discussion of this hallowed spot. The truth about this house was none of the tow-headed little pest's variously qualified business!

A wet, pathetic little hand was extended to him. He took it limply and then, experiencing one of those conscience-stabs that were getting to be quite the usual thing when he gazed upon Donna's distressed loveliness, he lifted her down and set her within the house.

"Oh, this is pretty!" she cried delightedly from the middle of the living room. "Oh, I want to rent it, Bill! I want to live here!"

"You can't. It's sold."

"Isn't the line of that stairway a perfect peach? I do wish we could—"

"Very likely you can get the same man to build you one," Gwynn went on relentlessly, and with a suggestion of that hypnotic stare, "Donna, tell me: where's the house you rented?"

He waited, almost on tiptoe. Noting the wholly sane appreciation which Donna was giving to the details of his future home, it was no trouble at all to visualize them as chugging away within another ten minutes, toward a definite goal.

"I—don't know, Bill," she faltered. "I can't remember."

"Not with the storm over?" William demanded.

"It doesn't just stop when the storm does—this," Donna murmured apologetically and touched a significant finger to her forehead. "Sometimes it lasts—oh, a long time. Hours."

The eyes that were upturned to him now grew more and more vacant, until a new sort of chill crept through William. Positively, he seemed to be alone here with a lady from whom reason was departing!

Or were the eyes so sickeningly vacant after all? Either he was growing unduly imaginative, or something very definite lurked deep down beyond that vacancy. It might have been a hint of the most intelligent kind of malice, it might have been a flitting suggestion of mockery verging upon triumph, or it might—well, it was none of these things, of course. Mr. Gwynn ceased staring abruptly as a trembling little hand rested upon his arm and he heard:

"Bill, I'll sit down on the stairs here and try hard to think. Truly, I will. Only don't look at me that way; don't be mad at me, Bill."

"Lord, I'm not mad at you," William mumbled. "Only if we can—well, sit down and try to do some thinking anyway."

He walked to the far window and stared out at the steadily dwindling storm. He'd wait for about five minutes and then, if the poor kid hadn't dug the address from her abused memory, he'd leave her here, after assuring her that she was absolutely safe, and just grab off a taxi and continue his trip to Grober in that. Time was whizzing by and his very life depended upon reaching Grober and borrowing—well, fifteen hundred at least and possibly even two thousand. William smiled suddenly, brightly; *there,* forsooth, was about the first real idea he'd shaped into definiteness since meeting Donna!

And would he be glad to see good old Grober! A character, that one—tougher than shoe leather, big as a house, coarse as a file, illiterate and primitive; but for all that, as William had somehow convinced himself these last hours, a very prince among men, for all that they said Grober had been a heavyweight fighter of some promise, whose too warm temper kept him from scaling the heights of fistic fame—or infamy.

William mustered his very best smile, which combined about all the soothing qualities that can be packed into a single smile, and prepared to turn to the girl.

And in that same instant William's mouth opened and the smile fled and, crouching, he peered at the wet Greenfield Avenue and the big, old car just then putting the brakes on with a piercing screech.

He knew that old sedan. That was the museum piece Grober had bought years ago and still insisted upon driving around, despite all his money. In the rear of it, three or four of his horny-handed employees were packed warmly, but at the wheel—and this was what caused William's heart to thump so happily—was Grober himself, staring at his van in the drive.

"Hooray!" said William. "Here's help at last!"

"What? What? That's not Freddie!" Donna cried.

"Freddie who? No, this is no Freddie—this is a man I want to see!" beamed Mr. Gwynn, as he started for the door.

Grober's car wheeled into the drive just then and stopped and Grober himself stepped out, a vast, low-browed, hairy man, only fairly well-dressed, who was not beaming at all. Indeed, had William but paused to inspect him carefully, instead of rushing forward like that with outstretched hand, he might have noted that Mr. Grober

seemed downright peeved about something.

"Well, Mr. Grober!" cried William. "I'm certainly glad to see you this afternoon!"

"Like hell you are!" responded Mr. Grober, and quite ignored the hand. "What's the idea, Gwynn?"

"The—ah—oh, the van," laughed William. "Well, that's quite a story, about that van, Mr. Grober. You see, I was just taking it back to you when—"

"Like hell you were!" said the other, who had no vocabulary at all. Then, gorilla arms swinging, he advanced upon William and stuck his ill-favored face almost into the face of William Gwynn, which at the time was wearing a distinctly startled expression. "Gwynn, how long you been using my property t' make a coupla dollars on the side?"

"Why—"

"Oh, I heard you was strapped for money! I heard your firm was broke," Mr. Grober went right on in his unpleasant way. "I didn't pay no attention—you always seemed like a decent young guy; maybe a little too much front, but decent—till this afternoon I got to thinkin' maybe there was something in it might interest me. Maybe the reason I wasn't gettin' no payments on this here van was, you needed 'em more yourself, eh?"

"Well, that," said William, "is a little bit too—"

"Aaah, lay off that stuff!" coarsely responded the person from whom he had fully intended to borrow fifteen hundred dollars. He rasped it out from one corner of his mouth, too, and then he looked his property up and down and smiled an evil smile. "I gotta say, Gwynn, I never had it doped out you was down this far, at that! I see you got a load on now. Got you with the goods, huh?"

"No, you didn't get me with any goods, Grober," Mr. Gwynn answered, with an icier smile. "If you will permit me to explain the matter, I think that, even in your present rather unreasonable mood—"

Now the person was looking at the house and round about him and he laughed grimly.

"Kind o' short-handed, ain't you, Gwynn? Or are you handling the stuff by yourself?"

"Neither," William said patiently. "I'm not handling it at all. This isn't even the house where the stuff belongs, in fact. We just ran in here till the rain—"

"What's that? It ain't the house where the furniture's going — this house ain't?" Grober interrupted and a nameless gleam appeared in his hostile eye.

"No."

"You're taking it to some other house, huh, Gwynn?"

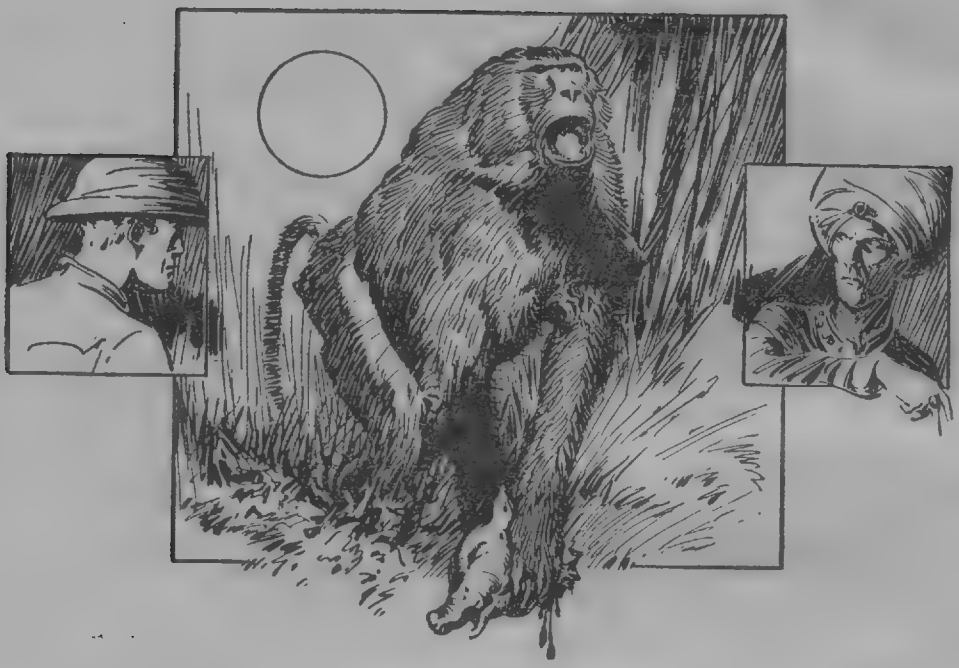
"Naturally!" William agreed. He found himself unpleasantly thrilled by Mr. Grober's new expression, which was that of a demon who had just whetted his pet pitchfork.

"Say, listen, feller!" the crude person said, rather exultingly. "You done me dirt lately, good and plenty, and maybe I can slip some of it back to you now. You say this ain't the house you're moving into?"

"Of course it isn't."

"You're a liar! It is!" the other guffawed suddenly, and beckoned toward his sedan, whence three men piled out with dutiful speed. "Jimmy! Git the stuff outen this van and move it into this here house!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



Death's Outpost

Mysterious was the fate that had dug the graves of his predecessors at the Majunga trading post and now loomed over Roger Chalmers

By GEORGE TIBBITTS

AFTER a week of residence at the lonely trading-post on the Majunga River, Roger Chalmers sat on the porch of his primitive shack smoking his after-dinner pipe and thinking strange, disturbing thoughts.

A great yellow moon made a path of jagged silver on the Majunga that flowed past the jetty just beyond his door with the rushing, gurgling sound of a river at night. The wind murmured in the stiff leaves of the palm trees, whispering of primitive, uncanny things. And to his right, in the tangled mass of vegetation dignified by the name of "garden," a swarm of fireflies hovered over those three mounds, so significant in their conformation.

One of the mounds was recent, made within a month. He knew it to be the grave of Midgeley, his predecessor at the trading station. The other two mounds covered with vines and wild growth—they must be graves, too; graves of the men who had preceded poor Midgeley. Chalmers had not been informed of them by Sandringham, the government agent who had sent him out here.

Roger Chalmers was not given to nervousness. He was used to loneli-

ness and solitude in far places, preferring them to city life. Nor was it the lean, bronzed young Englishman's first experience with the jungle. But never before had he felt this sense of warning, this sinister atmosphere of threat, as if the jungle were stalking him, creeping up on him, closing about him with savage, crushing power.

What had caused the deaths of those three men who preceded him? And why had not Sandringham, who had casually mentioned the sudden death of Midgeley, said nothing of the other two? What was the mystery of those three mounds?

Within the lamplit shack Chalmers could hear the placid *slap-slap* of the footsteps of Far Loo as he cleared away the dinner things. It gave him an odd sensation of comfort. Far Loo was his capable Chinese servant whom he had had at the British Club in Shanghai. He spoke poor English but excellent French, which Chalmers sometimes found an advantage.

He knocked the ashes from his pipe and went indoors. The ledgers left by his predecessor were in chaos and needed much auditing. He had hardly settled himself at the table when Far Loo shuffled in from the kitchen, holding a book in his hand. His small dark eyes glittered.

"This book," he said in French; "I find it in my kitchen. First, no book. Then, *voilà*, appears the book. Very mysterious."

Chalmers took the book and examined it curiously. It was a medium-sized black-bound book.

"Where did you find it?" he asked, also in French.

"On the table in the kitchen."

"Where did it come from?"

Far Loo shrugged like a Frenchman. "*Je ne sais pas.* I do not know."

"You mean somebody left it without your hearing or seeing them?"

"*Mais oui! Je ne vois rien. J'n'entends rien.* I see nothing. I hear nothing."

AN examination of the book showed some thirty-odd pages of handwriting, with the entries dated. It was a diary. Who had left it?

Chalmers pored over the book for more than an hour, and found that it consisted of three parts. From the difference in the handwriting it was obvious that the entries had been made by three men—no doubt the occupants of those three graves in the garden. With absorbing interest Chalmers read and reread the record.

The entries were incomplete and fragmentary, as if the writers had put down their thoughts only when in the mood. The first portion, in a tall, loose, erratic hand, covered several pages:

DECEMBER, 1920.

They are having the holidays at home now. The mosquitoes are terrible. I think I shall die of homesickness. The trenches were bad enough, but this is infinitely worse. To be invalided home from Ypres with a medal, only to die out here alone in this snake-ridden jungle! For I know I am going to die here. I have known it ever since I came, and I have been here two years. Two terrible years of trading with these Malays, Arabs and Chinese for rice, gutta-percha and trepang; of watching my food to see that they don't put poison in it; of never seeing a white man.

It is nothing less than murder to send a man out here alone; and Sandringham, that old devil, must have known it. I have asked him for a leave. But he is making too much money at this post and won't let me go. I am sick to death of mosquitoes, snakes and baboons. The only person who makes the place at all endurable is the Magi-

cian, and he is beginning to get on my nerves. I don't trust him. I don't trust anybody. I know I am going to die—

The writing veered off sharply with a long, jagged pen-scratch as if the hand of the writer had stopped suddenly; perhaps by the hand of Death.

"The Magician," muttered Chalmers as he put down the book. "Who is the Magician?"

Turning the pages, he found numerous references to the same character. The second portion, in a quite different hand, disclosed why the writer had been compelled to accept this post; he had had to leave England for family reasons. It contained a diatribe against women and against an unfaithful wife in particular. It also mentioned trading with the natives, the heat, the mosquitoes, snakes, baboons and loneliness, the same bitter denunciation of old Sandringham, the government agent. There was only one allusion to the Magician:

> The Magician is wonderful. He is marvelous! I have never seen a man with such powers, even on the stage. Yet I am afraid of him. I do not know whether his power is from God or the devil, but I am inclined to believe the latter.

The last page was signed with the name Sidney Blair Austin. Chalmers knew that a man of that name had occupied this post, and he had no doubt that Austin was now the occupant of one of those unmarked graves.

The last entry, in a neat, careful hand, covered barely two pages:

> I loathe this place! Nothing but heat, loneliness, mosquitoes, monkeys and snakes—and not all the snakes crawl on their bellies. Some of them walk about in human form. Of all the creatures here the strangest is the Magician. I find mention of him in this journal by the two men who were here before me. He has a profound influence with the natives. They worship him almost like a god. He seems to have supernatural powers, but I believe it is nothing more than legerdemain, with which he imposes upon these ignorant natives. I have seen him do all sorts of sleight-of-hand tricks.
>
> I am coming to believe that he is blocking me in my work. I can hardly induce the natives to do business with me. But he is the only one here who speaks English, hence I am compelled to seek his company or I shall die of the loneliness—

The writing ended abruptly at the foot of a page. Although it was not signed, it was obviously the record of David Midgeley, the last man here before himself. Chalmers dimly remembered David Midgeley as a boy, when they went up to school from the Sussex downs. And now Midgeley slept in one of those nameless mounds.

What, he wondered as he laid aside the journal, had caused the deaths of those three men? The heat—the loneliness—or the Magician? In this very room, at this very table, perhaps in this very chair, had sat the three men who had gone to a nameless death and now spoke to him through the written word. And why had that vaguely warning record been put in his hands?

HE rose and crossed over to the bookshelves. A connoisseur and lover of books, Chalmers on his arrival had eagerly examined the modest collection of well-worn volumes. Displaying a cosmopolitan taste in history, biography, fiction, poetry, and philosophy, it was a small but representative library for a man far from the society of his kind. From daily association with these books Chalmers had grown familiar with the location

of every volume on the shelves; and he knew for a certainty that the black-bound journal had not hitherto been among them. Whence had it come?

Chalmers flipped the pages of the journal again, noting each reference to the tricks of the Magician, which Midgeley had said were sleight-of-hand. He took up a pack of dog-eared cards from the table and riffled them with a practiced hand. In a versatile career Chalmers had acquired many tricks of conjuring, sleight-of-hand, and feats of so-called black magic. Palming several cards from the pack in his left hand, he reached out with his right and plucked them from out of the thin air. He looked up to see Far Loo watching him from the doorway with interested eyes.

Chalmers called the Chinaman to him and from the pocket of his jacket plucked the ace of spades. The smile on the Oriental's face indicated that his master's skill was not lost on him.

"You do it well, sir," Far Loo said in French.

"I'm a bit of a magician myself, Far Loo. There's going to be some competition for this Magician."

As he looked at his faithful Chinese servant, Chalmers thought suddenly of the well-ordered club life which Far Loo had represented, and a fear came upon him—fear that he, too, for the first time in his life, might be stricken with nostalgia, homesickness.

He tossed the cards back upon the table and went out to the porch. Gazing at the river he noted a number of canoes, each driven by a single occupant, moving swiftly down the stream. His thoughts reverted to his undergraduate days, and he wondered how the men with whom he had pulled an oar at the water races would compare with these natives in their queer craft.

His reveries were broken by weird noises on the night air, the beat of tom-tom drums, yells, fragments of savage singing. They came from the *kampong* across the river, where the natives were evidently holding festivities. This was, no doubt, the objective of the passing canoes.

Chalmers listened for a while, but inevitably his attention and his eyes returned to those three sinister mounds in the garden, with the swarms of glittering fireflies still hovering above them. Beyond the garden a dense growth of tropical vegetation made a black wall extending back to the jungle.

As he watched the fireflies, Chalmers's attention was attracted by a movement in the vegetation. He was startled to see a huge creature emerge from the trees. It proved to be a great baboon, its long grotesque arms threshing about in the vegetation as if in search of something. It leaped nimbly about among the graves and the fireflies like a giant ghoul. Suddenly there was a tremendous commotion and the shrill squealing of a pig. A quick plunge, and the baboon had caught the pig, whose squeals ceased abruptly. With a sense of nausea yet with a dreadful fascination, Chalmers saw the baboon with a twist of its great arms wrench off the pig's head and sink its lips into the gaping wound.

As Chalmers rose abruptly to go indoors, an aged Malay appeared in the moonlight and called to the big ape with a peculiar note. The baboon cringed in the presence of its master, but followed him into the thicket.

IT seemed to Chalmers a few moments later, as he sat inside the lamplit room, that under the stimulus of this bizarre experience, his mind, always highly sensitive, had become

clairvoyant. He could sense, almost feel, the presence of the three men who had lived in this room and had written of the mysterious Magician. Urged by a sudden impulse he again took up the journal to see if it would not yield some further and more explicit evidence. He found something he had not noticed before. One corner of the inside of the back cover was loose. It had evidently been pried up and then pasted down again. It came away readily under a prying finger. On the inside was a small, lightly-sketched figure of a baboon, and below it the word "Euripides." Surely that could not be the name of the giant simian?

On a sudden inspiration Chalmers turned to the bookshelves and looked for the volume of the great Greek poet. After considerable search he found it where it had fallen—or been placed—against the wall, hidden behind its companions on the bottom shelf. He scanned its pages swiftly, eagerly. On the flyleaf at the back of the book, in a space no larger than his thumb nail, was another lightly-penciled sketch of a baboon. He then noticed that the cover seemed bulky, indicating a thickness underneath. He pried up the paper lining of the cover and drew out several sheets of very thin paper filled with the small neat handwriting of David Midgeley. Locking his door, he spread them out and read:

To My Successor:

What I have to tell you I dare not write in the journal, because the diary's existence is known to Abdul Achmid Jaafar, known as the Magician. I take this means of warning you, else you will certainly die the same death that is waiting for me. I am helpless. I am spied on constantly and there is no means of getting a message through to headquarters. Beware of the Magician. By this time you undoubtedly know why he is called the Magician. He has power over the natives, and they will trade with no one else. He is getting wealthy in the trade that rightfully belongs to the British.

And this is his secret: He has a servant, an old Malay named Azrak, who has a pet baboon. Azrak has a trick by which he draws down the enmity of the baboon on any one out of favor with the Magician; he comes close to you, throws up his arms and falls suddenly to the floor. The baboon is far away when this happens. Because of the baboon's poor eyesight he believes his master has been attacked, and at the first opportunity he will leap from the darkness or drop from a tree—and kill. I have seen this happen twice to unfortunate natives, and once to a white man. Channing, the first man here, died of poison. The circumstances of his death were a bit thick, even for the conscienceless officials with whom Abdul was in league. Therefore Austin, the second man, was killed by the baboon. His head was literally torn from his body. Shortly after I discovered it, Azrak tried his trick on me. I saw the baboon peering into the shack from outside when Azrak threw his cursed fit. Thus far I have been able to evade the baboon, but sooner or later he will get me.

Do not shoot the baboon. The superstitious natives would kill you, then, for they worship the creature. If you have poor luck in trading with the natives, the Magician may leave you alone for a long time. If you succeed, he may strike quickly. Be assured that in the end he will kill you, anyway. And do not underrate the Magician. He was educated at Oxford and the Sorbonne. He will call on you in the evening in a tuxedo—imagine having a dinner jacket out in this beastly hole—and discuss literature and art. He has read everything, been everywhere. There is no justice here in the jungle, but may the God who gave you the intelligence to find my message give you power to defeat this devil!

When he had finished reading, Chalmers applied a match to the writ-

ten pages. He sat for a while in thought, then went out on the porch with his binoculars and gazed across the moonlit river. Twinkling lights were visible in the compound, but the sounds of revelry had ceased. He went down to the jetty where several of the company's canoes were moored, stepped into one and presently was drifting swiftly downstream with the current, using the paddle only for steering.

A short distance from the compound he crossed the river, drawing the canoe into shallow water beneath some overhanging branches. Then he plunged into the thicket and made his way forward until he was directly back of a large open space lighted by fires and torches and crowded with several hundred natives. Chalmers threw himself flat on the ground and watched.

In the center of the open space was a low platform with torches at the sides. A man was standing on the platform, talking and occasionally gesticulating. He wore a white Oriental turban. The flickering lights shone on the gold embroidery of his gaudy red silk jacket, and sparkled on the rings on his fingers and on the jeweled hilt of the curved *creese* that protruded from under the many folds of the *sarong* about his waist.

When he had finished speaking to the natives, the man produced a white handkerchief and after flourishing it to show that it concealed nothing, began a performance of sleight-of-hand. In swift succession he produced a knife, a hat, a *creese*, a rabbit, and a pair of doves. It was excellent work, and Chalmers was not surprised to observe its effect on the ignorant, barbaric spectators. They rose as one, with their hands clasped above their heads, and bowed to the ground like a class in calisthenics; evidently a gesture of reverence.

SATISFIED that he had seen the mysterious Magician at work, Chalmers made his way back to his canoe. He was astonished to see it slipping away. With a leap he gained the canoe and caught up the paddle. But something held the canoe back. Then he saw a man's dark fingers on the gunwale, and smashed at them with the paddle.

They disappeared, but still the canoe would not move. Chalmers crawled to the bow and peered over. A native, half immersed in the water, was clutching at the canoe. Chalmers struck at him with the paddle, and the man released his hold. His arm struck upward; there was the glitter of a knife, and a jagged hole appeared in the side of the canoe.

It was above the water line, however, and did not prevent Chalmers from paddling back in safety, pondering on this attack—presumably by one of the Magician's devoted henchmen.

Next morning on the jetty, where a crowd of natives lolled about waiting for the steamer from upriver, Chalmers tried an experiment. Some of these Malays had undoubtedly been at the gathering in the compound the night before and witnessed the performance of the Magician. Producing a gold piece from his pocket Chalmers spun it in the air and caught it, with an ostentatious display of skill. The natives were immediately attracted. He flipped it into the air again. It disappeared. Reaching out toward one of the Malays he withdrew the coin from his *sarong*, the folded sash worn about the waist. The old man cried out hoarsely, rolling his eyes and trembling.

His audience thus attracted, Chalmers flourished a white handkerchief and, by use of sleight-of-hand, produced from it a number of objects: a *creese*, a gourd, even a small dove. The astonished Malays chattered among themselves, then suddenly with one accord bowed to the ground.

Chalmers turned suddenly at the sound of a suave, drawling voice:

"Very well done, indeed."

Despite the fellow's change of costume, Chalmers realized that he was face to face with the conjurer of the previous evening, the Magician. Chalmers gave him a long, speculative look. A tall figure of a rapier-like slenderness, ascetic countenance with high cheekbones and strange, burning dark eyes; sartorially impeccable in a suit of white material that might have been made by a London tailor, he leaned gracefully on a walking stick and watched Chalmers's performance and his audience with an amused smile. There was a suggestion of cold disdain in the glance with which he scrutinized Chalmers, whose fair skin, blue eyes and sturdy physique made a striking contrast to himself.

"Very pretty parlor tricks, Mr. Roger Chalmers," he drawled. "Very pretty indeed."

"Yes, aren't they?" said Chalmers imperturbably. "And very useful at times, too. May I ask to whom I have the honor of speaking?"

The tall Arab smiled faintly.

"You speak, sir, to Abdul Achmid Hussein Jaafar, perhaps better known as the Magician."

"To be sure. I might have known. I have heard of you."

Abdul's white teeth gleamed in his dark face. He turned to the natives with a curt word and a gesture evidently intended for dismissal. They moved back, but did not immediately leave. The Arab turned upon them with a look of ferocity and a jargon of strange words, which dispersed them at once.

HE was all suavity again as he turned to Chalmers.

"It is a pleasure to see one so skilled in the use of legerdemain," he said. "The natives are peculiarly susceptible to its influence."

Chalmers realized that this subtle remark amounted to a declaration of war. He repressed a desire to hurl himself upon the immaculate Arab and square the account of poor Midgeley.

"So I have noticed," he replied coolly.

The Arab looked at him piercingly.

"Your predecessors," he said, "had better judgment than you appear to have, Roger Chalmers. At least they were more judicious than to attempt to compete with Abdul the Magician."

"My predecessors' better judgment," returned Chalmers, "or their judiciousness, gained them nothing. It worked out rather badly for them."

"What do you mean by that, Roger Chalmers?"

"They're all dead!"

The Arab laughed and showed his teeth. "Yes, they are all dead." He turned and looked at the river. "It's strange," he said musingly, "how the tropics seem to affect an Englishman. Under his own calm skies there is no more sober, steadfast, reliable individual in the world, but when fate or circumstance places him in a tropical clime, under a hot sun, he changes. He loses his head, his poise. He becomes —melodramatic."

"Do you consider that the English have been melodramatic in India, for instance?" Chalmers asked.

The Arab's face darkened. "I do. The English do not belong in India. They do not belong anywhere in the tropics—where the sun is hot."

"And you think they do not belong here on the Majunga?"

"Your words prove what I am saying." The Arab's laugh was slightly mocking. "You yourself are being melodramatic. You speak as if you thought I were your enemy. I am not. I wish to be your friend."

Chalmers decided he might as well be melodramatic. "Midgeley did not regard you as his friend, Abdul Achmid. I have read the journal left by him—and the others. Have you seen it?"

The Abdul's lips flared back from his white teeth. "Oh, yes. In fact, the journal was in my possession, and I sent Azrak to give it to your servant the other night. I wanted you to have it. I felt sure it would interest you. It is a wonderfully human document, and on Midgeley's demise I took care of it, fearing the natives might steal or destroy it."

"Do you know what caused Midgeley's death?" Chalmers asked suddenly.

"I will tell you." The tall Arab leaned toward him. "Midgeley died of hallucinations; auto-suggestion — and nothing else. Poor Midgeley! He was a fine boy. I loved him like a son; and now I miss him sorely."

He spoke with such apparent sincerity and simplicity that Chalmers's cool suavity was shaken. He was relieved to see Far Loo standing on the porch, a signal that his midday meal was ready. He moved along the jetty toward the cabin.

"Abdul Achmid," he said, "you spoke of melodrama. I agree with you that there is melodrama to be found here—not all of it of English making. I should be happy if you would dine with me some evening, when we can discuss—melodrama."

The Arab's eyes glittered. "I shall be delighted to come."

"Shall we make it soon?" Chalmers asked casually. "And by the way, do you dress for dinner?"

"I usually do. It is a European habit which I find difficult to shake off, though the Europeans at this post neglected it.... I hope to see you again very soon. And in the meantime"—he indicated the company property with a gesture—"I wish you success. You will find the trade in birds' nests, at least, particularly profitable with the Chinese."

Chalmers watched him stroll nonchalantly along the jetty, enter a waiting canoe and cross the river toward the native *kampong*. Far Loo was watching also.

"I do not like that man," he said in his impeccable French. "Witch-man. *N'est-ce pas?*"

AFTER luncheon, as Chalmers sat poring over the jumbled ledgers, his thought persistently went back to the events of the morning. That the suave Arab had been perturbed by his display of legerdemain he had no doubt. But how much more profoundly disturbing it must have been to the credulous, bewildered minds of the natives who had witnessed it. It was bound to have some effect on their submission to Abdul. They believed the Magician a god—and now another god had appeared!

The effect on the natives was apparent sooner than he had expected.

Looking up from his work he saw a stream of Malays approaching the jetty, bearing on their heads their native containers laden with gutta-percha,

bêche-de-mer and other produce. Quite evidently they were ready for trade. Hitherto, during this first week, there had been no trading with the natives.

He dropped his clerical work and hurried down to the jetty. Within three hours he did more business than the records showed Midgeley had done in as many months. First tribute to the new master of legerdemain!

It was dusk when the trading ceased. Chalmers went for a walk and a smoke along the river. He realized that this new-found allegiance of the natives would precipitate a climax. He had an ominous feeling that it was close at hand, perhaps only a matter of hours. Midgeley had said the Magician would strike swiftly. It was a relief to know that the sense of danger that had oppressed him was no longer an intangible thing. Now he had something to fight.

His thoughts reverted to the English countryside of his early youth. He could see the fields and hedgerows, could smell the scent of fresh-turned earth and the fragrance of hawthorn blossoms, could hear the song of the lark and the thrush. Would he ever see that fair land again, or would he find here, at this lonely jungle post, what poor Midgeley had found—a horrible death in the arms of a giant baboon?

When he returned to the cabin he dressed carefully, as if for a formal dinner. Far Loo, watching him, voiced his astonishment.

"We are having guests for dinner, yes?"

"I am expecting guests, yes, Far Loo, but not for dinner. You will serve dinner for one—for me—a little later."

Arrayed in tuxedo, dress shirt and tie as if for an evening at a London club, Chalmers lounged about the living-room. His nerves, at high tension all day, were taut. He opened the ledgers, but was unable to concentrate on them. He turned to the book shelves. There was no sound of approaching footsteps, but he was conscious that some one had entered from the porch and was standing behind him. He whirled about. An old native, tall, gaunt, clad only in a *sarong*, stood before him.

"What do you want?" demanded Chalmers.

"I am Azrak," said the old man, bowing. "Abdul Achmid send me."

"And what does Abdul Achmid desire?"

The eyes of the old native roved about the room, as if to make sure they were alone.

"He desire to come and make visit with white man."

"When?"

"To-night—later."

They were standing near the open door. The old native suddenly came close to Chalmers, who looked past him out of the door. The moon was not up yet, but he thought he discerned a movement in the trees beyond the garden.

"Tell Abdul Achmid I shall be very happy to see him at any time this evening," said Chalmers.

The old Malay turned to go; then suddenly, as if he had been struck, threw up an arm and fell to the floor. Chalmers bent over him as if to help him. The native backed away, holding his arm before his face in the gesture of defending himself. He mumbled something in dialect.

"I tell Abdul. He come soon."

Chalmers followed him to the door and stood for a moment in full view of any one outside. Then he went inside and closed the door and locked it.

"You may serve dinner now," he said to Far Loo. "Our guest will be here later."

DINNER finished, he removed his formal attire. He took up the journal left by his predecessors and began writing where Midgeley had left off.

PART FOUR:

There are more thrills here than in an American moving picture. I have solved the mystery of the deaths of Midgeley, Austin and Channing, the three men who preceded me here. In my own case I am confident there will be no mystery. I am expecting a call from the Magician, Abdul Achmid Jaafar, an educated, cultured Arabian gentleman who wears a tuxedo in the evening. This is the first time he has favored me with a call, and I fear it may be the last—

A sudden commotion outside made him drop his pen and spring to the door. Struggling on the porch, in the moonlight, was a huge baboon with his great hairy arms about the body of a man—a man in tuxedo dinner dress. It was the Magician, Abdul Achmid. His white shirtfront was stained with blood. The screams of the Arab and the cries of the enraged animal made a horrible clamor. With a desperate effort the Magician drove a knife into the beast, which shrieked with pain and seized the Arab in its dreadful embrace... Chalmers threw his arm across his eyes at the ghastly spectacle.

The stricken baboon, with the Magician's knife protruding from its heart, shambled off the porch and disappeared among the trees.

When Chalmers had quieted the natives who had been attracted by the outcry, and sent them away with the beheaded body of the Magician, he went inside and found Far Loo carefully folding up his master's tuxedo jacket.

"You threw it on the floor," said the Chinaman.

"Put it away, Far Loo. I won't need it again for a long time. I wore it to-night for the sole benefit of Azrak and his pet baboon."

THE END.

Origin of Chop Suey

CHOP SUEY originated at a dinner that Prince Li Hung Chang gave in New York when he made his trip around the world, and so is really an American-Chinese delicacy. Prince Li carried his own chef with him, and the menu was strictly Chinese.

One of the dishes particularly pleased the wife of the guest of honor, and she asked the prince what it was. Prince Li called in his chef, who said in Chinese, "It is a creation of my own—just a 'chop suey.'" The words, translated into English, would mean a mixture or hash. Prince Li said in English, "It is a 'chop suey.'" The American woman spread the news of chop suey, the most wonderful dish. The name was taken up extensively by the Chinese restaurants in the United States, and to-day "chop suey" is the chief item on their bill of fare. It has been reported that a "chop suey" palace, started in Shanghai, has closed its doors.

Oscar B. Aldrich.

Austin's fist caught Mendez squarely

The Trail of Deceit

Turning and twisting to dodge the fate their misdeeds have earned, the cowmen of the Keno border country plunge deeper into crime and treacherous plotting

By W. C. TUTTLE

Author of "Bluffer's Luck," "Me and Peewee, Ltd.," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

GOOBER GLENDON and his young partner Johnny Wells are in Silver Bar when Jigger Slade, a range detective hired by Frank Austin, owner of the Star A, is shot. Sheriff Nolan says wild young Hal Austin, Frank's son, did it while drunk, in self-defense; but Goober, pocketing Hal's gun, finds it was clean, unfired.

Austin, coming to his ranch (near Keno City) with his rich wife and his daughter Betty, as a result of Foreman Cal Sands's reports of Hal's wildness, believes Cal's statement that Nolan had covered up Hal's shooting Slade in the back; and Austin gives Sands the half-interest in the Star A which he had planned to give Hal. He also confides his secret: that he never got a divorce from Rosita Diaz, whom he now finds to be still alive, in the border town of Indian Wells, and the

This story began in the Argosy for June 14.

mother of Juana Diaz, the girl Hal has wooed under an assumed name and taken away from Sands.

Rosita's twin sister is dead, but the sister's husband, Porfiro "Lobo" Mendez is boss of the Mexican border town of Piñon. When Sands comes to bribe Rosita to leave Indian Wells before Hal's mother and sister carry out their intention of coming to meet Juana, Rosita refuses; and Mendez's henchmen sandbag and rob him.

Sands, who had been given five thousand dollars by Austin to bribe the Silver Bar sheriff, Nolan, now gives three Star A men—Riecho, Elkinson, and Britton—Austin's checks for two hundred and fifty dollars to kidnap Mrs. Austin and Betty *en route* to Indian Wells. But the women are kidnaped before they reach the appointed spot, and Riecho, driving the buckboard, is killed. Goober finds the check, and a ring stolen in a stage robbery, in Riecho's pockets.

An attempt to kill Goober, which he blames on Terrill of the 7 Bar 7, a former outlaw and deadly foe, leads Goober and Johnny to that ranch in time to see Terrill murdered by some one from Silver Bar. Later they follow the two 7 Bar 7 hands to a box cañon—and watch an ambush which wipes out those two guardians of stolen horses. Near where the ambush took place, he and Johnny stumble on the dead body of Sheriff Nolan.

CHAPTER XVI.

"COINCIDENCE POKER."

"WE'LL go to Silver Bar and tell 'em they're short one sheriff," said Goober. "And when we go back to Keno City, we can leave word for the Star A to have a look at them horses. I know I'm not goin' to take a chance on goin' down in that cañon to turn 'em loose. Life is too sweet to me to go monkeyin' with them kind of killers—and us with six-guns."

"Nolan must have been trailin' 'em," said Johnny.

"Mm-m-m? Do yuh know, Johnny, sometimes I'm disappointed in you."

"What do yuh mean?"

"Do a little thinkin'. Them 7 Bar 7 fellers down at the corral must have been rustlers. Nolan bored straight for here, went down the hill. I figure he had a hunch that the other two hadn't got here yet; so Nolan waited down there a while. After a wait he went on, not sneakin', jist travelin'. When the shootin' started he high-tails it out of here and meets one of the other gang at the top of the cañon."

"Yuh figure Nolan a horse-thief, eh? All right, Goober; but who shot 'em?"

"Yore guess would be as good as mine."

"Hijackers?"

"Not a bad theory, Johnny; but one I never thought about. Anyway, mebbe I can answer that one, after we get to Silver Bar."

They stopped again at the 7 Bar 7 and searched the house, stable and all the sheds, but found nothing of interest. About a hundred yards from the rear of the house was a scraggly old oak, on which had been nailed a rough wooden target, about three feet square. It had been pretty well shot to pieces, indicating that the men of the 7 Bar 7 were in the habit of doing considerable rifle practice.

Scattered around on the ground were dozens of empty cartridge shells of different calibers, and a great many

empty revolver shells. Goober made a collection of the 30-30 shells and sat down in the shade to examine them. It is seldom that any two rifles leave the same firing pin marks, and half of those he had found on the cañon rim were very distinctive, as the pin had not struck the primer near the center.

The shells found at the house were all discolored, as though they had lain out in the weather a long time, and two of them matched the fresh shells exactly. Goober showed them to Johnny, who found another one, trampled into the dirt; one which had apparently been shot months previous to this time.

"That don't prove anythin'," said Johnny skeptically.

"Mebbe not, pardner; but smaller things than that have dislocated men's necks," replied Goober, pocketing the shells. "Big oaks from little acorns grow. Didn't yuh learn that in school?"

"Nope," grinned Johnny. "I was always at the foot of the class."

"So was I," seriously. "It used to bother me, until I discovered that they taught both ends the same thing. Let's go over and see Silver Bar."

IT was noon when they rode into Silver Bar, without meeting anybody. They went straight to the courthouse and found Ed Chandler, the prosecuting attorney, and told him the story. Chandler did not get excited. He made a few notes on their story, asked a number of pointed questions as to the location of the bodies, and went out to find the coroner.

"I'll want you at the inquest," he told them. "Will you be here?"

"Here or in Keno City," replied Goober, and Chandler thanked him.

Goober and Johnny walked back up the street and stopped at the bank, where Ed Cates, the banker, greeted them cordially.

"I was just wonderin' what became of you two," smiled that ex-cowboy.

"Oh, we've been foolin' around the country," laughed Goober.

"Over around Keno City?" Cates asked.

"Yeah—there and Indian Wells."

"How's our old friend Austin, Goober? Remembered you yet?"

"Well, he ain't took me to his bosom, Ed; and I don't expect he will."

Cates laughed softly. "No, I don't expect he will. Sands, his foreman, was in here a while ago."

"Yeah?"

"Yes. He tells me he's half owner of the Star A outfit now."

"I heard he was. Do they do their bankin' over here, Ed?"

"No, they don't. Sands had a couple checks to cash. He said the boys kinda cleaned up on Austin in a poker game the other night. The checks were made out to—uh—Britton and Elkinson for two hundred and fifty apiece."

"That's a good clean-up for a couple punchers," grinned Goober.

"Six months' wages."

"Y'betcha. I suppose Sands told yuh what happened to Mrs. Austin and her daughter."

"Why, no, he never told me anything about them. What happened?"

Goober related what he knew about it, and Cates gasped indignantly.

"Why, that's a damnable thing to do, Goober. I tell you it's time we had a clean-up around here. Things are getting worse all the time. Somebody tried to murder you, and they did murder Terrill. We need a new set of peace officers."

"You'll probably get 'em, Ed. Yuh see, Nolan was killed this mornin'."

"Great Scott! Nolan dead?"

"Plenty dead," and Goober related the shooting to Cates.

They left Cates wondering what it was all about, and sauntered down to the depot. Just below the depot, about three hundred yards, was the corrals and loading-chute, where a number of cattle cars were spotted on a side-track.

Goober led the way up to the ticket window of the little depot, where a tired-looking agent was tilted against his desk, reading a newspaper. He looked up at them, but did not offer to come to the window.

"How many of them cars are for the 7 Bar 7?" asked Goober.

"All of 'em," he replied peevishly. "And I wish they'd start loadin'. If they don't load by to-night, they'll have to pay demurrage."

"Thank yuh," said Goober.

"I reckon the railroad will have to cancel that demurrage," grinned Goober. "Or send a collector with an asbestos bill to git the money."

It required several hours to assemble the Silver Bar officials and make the trip out to the blind cañon, but they found things as represented by Goober and Johnny, except that there were no horses in the hidden corral, nor could they find any in the cañon. Both Shafer and Blewett were riddled with bullets, killed on the spot. One horse was dead, the other near the corral, the reins tangled in the brush.

They packed the bodies out to the 7 Bar 7 ranch, where they were loaded in a wagon and taken back to Silver Bar.

"I'LL betcha I know what happened. Some of them Flask River punchers knowed that the 7 Bar 7 was stealin' horses and keepin' 'em in the hidden corral in that blind cañon; so they hijacked the whole works, after they wiped out the 7 Bar 7."

Thus Smoky Hill, deputy sheriff of Keno City, tilted against the wall in an office chair, hugging his knees, talking to Pete La Plante. The sheriff himself was humped in his desk chair, trying to dig a broken broom-straw from the stem of his old pipe. Finally Pete flung the pipe aside and reached for a cigarette paper.

"You dunno a damn thing about it," the sheriff declared.

"Mebbe you do?" Smoky retorted.

"Yea-a-ah—and mebbe I don't. All we're reasonably sure of is that the 7 Bar 7 was stealin' horses, but we don't know whose horses, because there wasn't no horses in the corral nor cañon when them fellers went in to git the bodies."

"Uh-huh." Smoky scratched his neck thoughtfully, one eye squinted at the sheriff. "What about Nolan?"

"They got him cold—thasall."

"Shore—that's plenty true. But what I'd like to know is how in hell them fellers ever disposed of the horses, unless they relayed 'em out through the Flask River country. Still yuh can't imagine that because there ain't no market out that-away. Now, if Nolan—"

"I wish you'd quit worryin' about what happened in another county, and do a little worryin' about what has happened around here, Smoky. Every time I get set to do a little thinkin' you allus bother me."

"You—uh—say! Pete, do you mean to set there and tell me that *you* are goin' to think? Why, I wouldn't be more s'prised if I saw a burro tryin' to lay a aig. But go ahead. All I ask is to set here and see what yuh look like in the face."

The sheriff glared indignantly.

"You ain't thinkin'," charged Smoky.

"The hell I ain't! If you knowed what I'm thinkin', you'd git to hell out of here and never come back."

"Thasso? If I thought for a minute that my ability wasn't appreciated, I'd—"

"You'd what?" Pete demanded.

"I'd be s'prised at yore ignorance, that's what I'd be."

"Will you git out of here, Smoky? Will yuh? I don't want yore blood on my head, but—"

"What do yuh figger on doin'—buttin' me in the nose? That's the only way you'll ever git my blood on yore head. And while yo're buttin, I'll—Hello, Goober."

"Howdy," grinned Goober from the doorway. "How are yuh?"

"I'm all right," replied Smoky. "Pete's thinkin'."

"Was tryin' to think," corrected the little sheriff dryly.

"Close enough," Smoky agreed. "Now we'll git some straight talk on this killin' over in the Silver Bar country. The stage driver heard some of it and guessed at the rest. And he ain't a awful good guesser, if yuh ask me for a opinion."

"I've never knowed you to *have* to be asked," muttered the sheriff.

"What news on the missin' women?" asked Goober. The sheriff shook his head sadly.

"I seen Austin and Sands jist ride in," offered Goober.

"Pretty tough on Austin," said the sheriff.

Smoky started to say something, but stopped as Austin himself came in. He looked years older, his eyes bloodshot from lack of sleep, unshaved.

"What's new?" asked the sheriff.

"Not a thing—no word of any kind. Have you heard anything?" asked the Star A owner.

"Nothin', except the trouble over at the 7 Bar 7," Pete said.

"What was that?" Austin demanded.

The sheriff explained about the triple killing, and as he was talking, Cal Sands came in. He had heard about it at one of the stores.

"What do yuh know about the murder of Nolan?" Sands asked the sheriff.

"I was jist tellin' Austin what we heard," replied La Plante, and repeated the story. Sands turned to Goober.

"I understand you saw some of this, Glendon."

"Yeah, we saw some of it—me and Johnny."

"How did you happen to be over there at the blind cañon?" Sands snapped.

"Lookin'," replied Goober shortly.

"Oh!"

"Did you see any of the men who did the shooting?" asked Austin.

"No, we didn't."

THE sheriff reached in a desk drawer and took out the check he had found on Riecho's body. Austin's lips tightened for a moment, as he looked at it.

"I—I lost in a poker game," he said. "Paid in check, you know."

It satisfied the sheriff.

"Queer kind of a game yuh play out there," said Goober. Sands turned.

"What do yuh mean, Glendon?"

"Cow-punchers winnin' two hundred and fifty dollars."

"Anythin' queer about that?" Sands demanded.

"I'd call it coincidence poker."

"Coincidence? I don't foller yuh, Glendon."

"No-o-o-o? Seven hundred and fifty dollars, split three ways."

"I think we better be going along, Cal," said Austin nervously. "There may be some news in Indian Wells."

Sands nodded. He, too, wanted an excuse to get out of that office.

"If I hear anythin', I'll let yuh know right away," said the sheriff.

"Thank yuh, Pete," replied Sands, and followed Austin out of the office.

"Now, what's all this talk about coincidence poker?" demanded the sheriff.

Goober laughed softly. "I dunno, Pete. Didja see Austin flinch?"

"I did," said Smoky.

"You would," grunted the sheriff. "But what was it all about?"

"Search me," grinned Goober. "When Riecho was killed, he had that check for two hundred and fifty on him. Yesterday Cal Sands cashed two checks for the same amount at the Silver Bar Bank, drawn in favor of Elkinson and Britton."

"Each one of 'em had a check for two hundred and fifty?" asked Smoky.

"That's right. And Cal Sands told Ed Cates, the banker at Silver Bar, that they were gamblin' checks. Mebbe it's all right—but I calls it coincidence poker."

"What's the answer?" queried the sheriff.

Goober shrugged his shoulders. "I wish I knew, Pete."

"So do I. Glendon, this here kidnapin' don't look right to me. If I was a married man, and somethin' like that happened to my wife, I'd shore—well, I wouldn't take it the way Austin does."

"I've knowed men who would almost pay to git their wife stole," said Smoky.

"You never knowed any such a damn thing!" snorted Pete. "Why say things like that? Sometimes yuh make me mad—talkin' foolish thataway."

A slow smile overspread Goober's face, and he got slowly to his feet.

"Well, I reckon I'll go and wrap m' insides around a fried aig," he told them. "See yuh later."

CHAPTER XVII.

MENDEZ SHOWS HIS TEETH.

AUSTIN and Sands were riding out of town, heading for Indian Wells. Austin cast a worried glance at the old cowboy, as they rode past Goober.

"Damn nosey old rat!" snorted Sands angrily.

"I don't see how he found out about those other two checks," said Austin despondently. "Oh, I was a fool to pay them in checks. Why didn't I draw the cash, and pay them in money?"

"No use cryin' over spilled milk," retorted Sands. "But let 'em think what they please about the checks. They can't prove anythin'. That damn Cates told Glendon about it. I told him that the two boys nicked yuh in a poker game. That's all right. Next time I git a chance, I'll shore tell Mr. Cates a few things about bankers that talk out of turn."

But this did not seem to reassure Austin, whose nerves were frayed. He struck his fist on the saddle horn and cursed the day he ever came back to Arizona.

"I'd almost bet that Rosita is behind this," he said, when his anger had cooled sufficiently to enable him to make a coherent statement.

"She might," agreed Sands. "Of course, she hasn't any love for you."

"Why should she? Oh, I'm not trying to excuse myself. I did her the worst injury possible, when I deserted her—left her flat, without a cent—and a baby coming. But why not injure me personally, instead of striking at me through my wife and daughter? They never harmed her."

"Mexican idea," said Sands. "She knows you've got money, and she knows that the longer she holds off, the more you'll pay."

"Then you think she's at the bottom of it, Cal?" eagerly.

"It was your idea. I said it was possible."

"I'll see her the minute we—"

"Use a little sense," warned Sands. "Let her make the first move."

"Maybe you're right; you always are. I'll let her make the first move. But if I could only know that Laura and Betty are all right!"

"So would I," truthfully admitted Sands.

AS they rode into Indian Wells, Porfiro Mendez was at his favorite pastime. In a mean little patio behind a small *cantina,* its rear exit opening into an ill-smelling alley, were Mendez and about twenty-five of his countrymen. They were all seated or kneeling on the hard-packed ground, crowded closely together around an open spot about six feet square.

Just now the space was unoccupied. On one side of the circle was a wide-hatted Mexican, boasting a long, villainous mustache and a new serape. In both hands he held a gamecock, almost denuded of feathers, its skinny neck jerking this way and that way, bill half-opened, as though searching for what it might devour.

On the opposite side was Mendez, a reddish-colored rooster held between his knees, while he jangled a handful of silver *pesos* between his palms.

"*Cinco á dos,*" he chanted. "*Cinco á dos.*"

Mendez was offering to wager five to two on his rooster. But the gambling element was cautious. Mendez had never exhibited this rooster before, having brought it from Piñon. Still, the local gamecock was famous, having won many a battle in that *cantina* patio. Neither bird wore steel spurs; they were as nature intended them.

"*Cinco á dos. Cinco á dos.*"

The odds were attractive. A thin-faced Mexican tossed two *pesos* into the ring, and they were immediately covered by Mendez. Another and another threw their money in, until Mendez was obliged to dig deeply in his pockets. With all bets made, the crowd moved back a few inches, and with a quick flip of their hands, the men tossed the roosters into the cleared space.

It was as though two bunches of feathered dynamite had exploded. There was no sparring, no feeling out of each other. Feathers flew under the rip of spurs, as they crashed in mid-air. And then something happened. One of the birds bolted to the top of a wide hat, gave a convulsive squawk and launched itself to the top of the patio wall just to the left of the exit.

It was Mendez's very red rooster, its neck almost bare of feathers—disqualified. In the parlance of the prize ring, it was a technical knock-out.

"Escamillo!" roared Mendez. "Son of a crow!"

And before anybody could move, Mendez whipped out a heavy Colt gun, and the bullet seemed to hit the luckless gamecock dead center. At any rate it blew Escamillo straight out

from the wall. There came a few moments of dead silence. The other rooster was safely in its owner's hands, the money still on the ground, flashing back the rays of the sun, when Ricardo Gonzales came staggering in through the open patio gate.

His face was bloody, and a long reddish feather seemed to have caught in one corner of his mouth.

"*Madre de Dios!*" roared Mendez. "Did you get hit, fool?"

Ricardo assumed an injured air, felt of the knife inside his sash, and answered in his very best English:

"Somebody hit me on this face weeth damn died cheecken."

There was a general laugh, and the winners began picking up their money. Ricardo wiped a sleeve across his face and looked meaningly at Mendez, who turned to the crowd.

"Next time I shall bring an eagle—not a crow, like Escamillo," he said humbly.

He led the way and Ricardo followed him into the *cantina*.

"Señor Austin arrived," said Ricardo.

"Alone?"

"With Señor Sands."

Mendez nodded, gave Ricardo one of his few remaining *pesos*, and went out to the street, while Ricardo went back to wager his silver on the next main. Sands was talking with a Mexican merchant across the street, and as there was no sign of Frank Austin, Mendez guessed rightly that the wealthy cattleman was over at the Casa del Diaz.

Mendez smiled at his good fortune in finding Austin there alone. There was no one else in the place, except the Indian cook. Austin was seated at one of the little tables, waiting for Sands, who had stopped to talk a little with Mexicans he knew who might have a little information.

MENDEZ bowed graciously and smiled at Austin, who regarded him coldly.

"Thees ees a pleasure," sighed Mendez, taking the vacant chair.

"What do you want?" asked Austin coldly.

"Who knows, until we talk?" smiled Mendez.

"Eh?"

"To talk ees to unnerstand," smiled Mendez. "I'm unnerstand many theengs."

"Damn your understanding," growled Austin.

Mendez grew sober, shrugged his shoulders. With Austin in his present mood, Mendez decided to come to the point. There was no friendship between them.

"You do not spik *español?*" queried Mendez.

"No."

"Too bad. I do not spik Englis' so good. But we mus' unnerstand each other. Now"—Mendez leaned closer across the table; he had been eating much garlic, so Austin leaned back—"now, I'm tell you w'at I know, Señor Austin. One time, long time ago, we marry two seester. Your wife ees name' Rosita—thees daughter from you ees name' Juana."

"Damn you!" snarled Austin. "What is this to you?"

Mendez laughed deep in his thick throat. "Your son ees weesh to marry wit' Juana, eh? Your wife don' know thees Juana ees your daughter. Suppose I'm tell thees thing to your wife."

Austin got to his feet, his jaw shut tightly, his eyes blazing. Mendez stood up.

"You damned blackmailer!" rasped Austin.

Mendez shrugged his shoulders indifferently. "To me thees thing make no difference. I'm love thees Juana—me, myself. You don't care, eh? All right, I go tell your son. I tell heem that he can not marry weeth thees girl, biccause she ees his 'alf-seester."

"No," said Austin hoarsely. "Don't do that. Damn you, how much do you want?"

Mendez smiled slowly, feeling that he had won his point. How much? He was at a loss to know just what to ask. Then:

"The price ees twenty thousand dollar—American gold."

"Twenty thousand!"

"Twenty thousand—now."

Austin moved closer. "Too high, Mendez; much too high."

Mendez laughed softly. "Too 'igh, eh? Twenty-five thousand now, *señor*."

Mendez had his hands down, totally unprepared, when Austin's right fist, backed by every ounce of the big man's body behind it, caught Mendez square in the mouth. The blow would have staggered a steer. Mendez went down in a heap against the wall, blood soaking his mustache from a badly cut lip.

For several moments Austin stood over him, both hands clenched, but Mendez made no move to get up. Slowly the big cattleman relaxed. His right hand was bleeding from contact with Mendez's teeth, and he wrapped it in a handkerchief, as he walked out of the place.

Mendez, dazed and badly cut about the mouth, did not move for several moments after Austin had left the patio, and then he merely lifted himself on one elbow.

"*Está la vida!*" screamed a parrot.

Mendez felt tenderly of his cut lips, lifted his eyes and saw Rosita at the table, looking down at him. Her expression was harsh, and her eyes seemed to bore into his soul. He got slowly to his feet, groping at the wall. Rosita handed him his big sombrero, and pointed toward the front entrance.

"I heard what was said," she told him in Spanish. "Leave this place and never return, Porfiro. A man who would take money for silence is worse than one who steals. Go!"

"You say this to me?" Mendez grinned wickedly with bleeding lips. "You fear I may take all his money, leaving none for you. You call me worse than a thief, eh? Me, Porfiro Mendez! You shall both pay. *Caramba,* such treatment for me!"

Mendez stumbled from the Casa del Diaz, mopping his lips and muttering curses. He saw Austin and Sands together on the street, but he did not give them a second glance. Ricardo stepped out of the *cantina* and met Mendez, stopped short at sight of his master.

"*Dios,* what 'appen to you?" he asked.

Mendez mopped his lips, as his hands fumbled with the tie rope of his horse, but he did not reply. As he swung into his saddle, Sands started across the street.

"Wait a minute, Mendez!" he called.

Mendez turned his head and looked full at Sands.

"Go from hell, will you?" he snarled, and galloped down the street.

SANDS went back to Austin and shook his head sadly.

"Bad break on yore part, Frank."

"Perhaps it was, but I'll not let any damned Mexican blackmail me. Why,

he had the unlimited gall to ask twenty-five thousand; so I just knocked half of his teeth out."

"Might be expensive dentistry."

"Do you think for a minute that I'd pay him that much?"

"That ain't the point. You should take it under advisement. You could drag out the negotiations for weeks. In the meantime, all this might be straightened out, the women back in San Francisco. Now, you've got an enemy—and a damn bad one. Mendez is a bad hombre, Frank. Oh, I don't like him any better than you do, but right now we can't afford to make enemies."

"I won't be blackmailed—damned if I will!"

Sands shrugged his shoulders. "You know your own business."

"I wonder where Hal is?"

"Did you ask about him at the Casa?" Sands asked.

"Nobody there, except the cook—until Mendez showed up."

"Maybe we can find him around town. You didn't see Rosita?"

"I told you there wasn't anybody there!" Austin snapped in irritation.

"That's right, Frank. Well, I dunno what good we can do here. I wish I'd had a chance to talk with Mendez. I had an idea of offering him a good price to see if Mrs. Austin and Betty might not be in Mexico."

"Do you suppose he'd go and tell Hal that—that Juana is his sister?"

"Might. He's mad enough. Still, he knows that would ruin any chance he might have to collect from you. No, I don't believe he will. Mendez is not exactly a fool."

"I've a good notion to go down to Piñon and—"

"Forget that," interrupted Sands. "Mendez is the big guy in Piñon. What he'd do to you would be plenty. You want to stop and remember that when you cross that line, you haven't any U. S. A. backin' yuh. All that would be left would be a memory of a danged fool that went where he wasn't wanted.

"Not that Mendez wouldn't welcome yuh. He'd probably turn out the Chamber of Commerce, or whatever passes for such things down there, and greet yuh. He might hand yuh the key to the city—and then use it to lock yuh in their pet hoosegow. I may be all wrong, but I feel that Mendez is a jigger that believes in *ojo por ojo y diente por diente;* meanin' 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' Only he might take a few extra teeth for good measure."

Austin nodded gloomily. But an instant later he brightened as he saw Hal ride into town.

"You better talk with him alone," suggested Sands.

Austin nodded and strode up the street to the little stable, where Hal kept his horse. They met at the doorway.

"Any news?" asked Austin anxiously. Hal shook his head gloomily.

"We haven't heard a thing," sighed Austin. "I felt sure some of us would hear something by to-day."

"I don't know what to think," said Hal. "I laid awake all last night, trying to puzzle out some reason for it, and the only reason I could find was that somebody prevented mother and Betty from meeting Mrs. Diaz and Juana."

"Why would they?" queried Austin cautiously.

"If you don't know—I'm sure I don't, dad."

"Do you mean to—why, Hal, you don't mean that I had any—"

"I'm not accusing anybody," his

son said doggedly. "But you didn't want them to meet. You'll have to admit that part of it."

"But that—that was merely because I didn't want you to marry this girl. I was afraid your mother and Betty might be influenced by meeting them."

Hal laughed bitterly. "You came here to stop me from marrying her. Well, I hope you're satisfied."

"Then you're not going to marry her, Hal?"

"So you don't know anything about it, eh?"

"About what?"

The lines on Hal's face deepened, eyes half-shut, as he looked at his father. He had come to that country, a young, smooth-cheeked young man; now he was years older, hard-faced, bitter. Perhaps dissipation had caused some of it.

"YOU say you don't know anything about it," Hal said evenly. "I've got to accept your word for that."

"Hal, I don't know what you are talking about."

"Well, I'll tell you what you don't know; Juana disappeared last night. She never slept in her bed, and no one knows where she went."

"No!"

"I've been looking for her—looking all around." Hal shook his head wearily.

"You haven't notified the sheriff or—"

"What's the good of that? Rosita didn't want me to—I mean Mrs. Diaz; everybody calls her Rosita."

"Isn't she worried?"

"Not outside. She's wonderful," Hal said.

"Does she suspect any one?"

"Who knows?"

"What are you going to do now?" asked Austin.

"Do? What can any one do?"

"Come back to the ranch with us, Hal. Bury the hatchet with Sands. He is willing to be friends—forget everything. We've got to stick together in this, son. I'm half crazy over it."

Hal shook his head. "No, I can't do that. With you—yes; but not with Sands."

Austin sighed and looked gloomily at Hal. "I suppose you heard that Nolan, the sheriff, and those two men of the 7 Bar 7 were killed yesterday."

"Killed? Who killed them?"

"No one seems to know. It seems there's a blind cañon north of the 7 Bar 7, where a corral had been built. The two men were shot down at the corral, and Nolan was killed at the top of the trail, just at the rim of the cañon."

"Rustlers?" Hal asked.

"Except Nolan."

"Why except Nolan?"

"He was the sheriff!" Austin snorted.

"Accepted money to cover up a—a murder, didn't he? Is rustling worse than that?"

"Forget that. It's all past and done. You don't seem to appreciate the fact that you are not being tried for murder."

"I suppose I am pretty ungrateful. Still, I'm grateful for one thing."

"What is that?"

"The fact that mother and Betty believe me innocent."

"I'm glad they do. But won't you come back with us?"

"You know why I won't."

"Well, I'm sorry. You misjudge Sands badly. Still, you always were stubborn; so I guess there's no way out, except to leave you here."

Austin turned on his heel and went back down the street, anxious to tell Sands the latest developments. The tall foreman whistled with astonishment, and his face grew grave.

"Mendez," he said harshly. "I'll betcha that greaser is to blame."

"Damn him, he wasn't looking for ransom—he was trying to blackmail me."

"Mendez is no fool. Do yuh think for a minute he'd ever let you know he kidnaped 'em? If we don't get word from 'em by to-morrow night, we'll go down to Piñon. I'll take Elkinson and Britton, and we'll whip the whole town."

"Won't Mendez be looking for you?"

"Of course he will. Nothing nor nobody ever crosses the line here without Mendez knowing it. He's got a dozen Yaqui Indians on his staff, and yuh might as well try to dodge death or taxes. But we'll go, in spite of that."

They stopped in Keno City, and told the sheriff about Juana's disappearance. Goober was with the sheriff, and seemed greatly interested in Sands's narrative. After Sands and Austin went on, Goober talked seriously with La Plante. Apparently the sheriff was ignorant of the fact that Austin had ever been the husband of Rosita Diaz, and consequently hadn't the least suspicion of any reason for the kidnaping.

"I think them women are in Mexico," said Goober.

"Who in the devil would take 'em to Mexico?"

"Safer than on this side, Pete."

"Yuh mean that some Americans took 'em across?"

"I wouldn't say that. Mebbe they paid a Mexican to do it."

"What white man or white men would do a thing like that?"

"I dunno," Goober admitted. "You ever been in Piñon?"

"Shore—quite a while ago."

Goober thought it over a long time. Finally he nodded to himself, saying:

"It's worth tryin', anyway. Suppose that you and Smoky and Johnny and me slide down across the line about to-morrow night and have a look at Piñon."

"Hell, I can't do that," La Plante protested.

"Not officially; but yuh might leave yore badge at home."

La Plante shook his head. He didn't care to mix into any Mexican trouble.

"Suppose," said Goober, "that them three women are held down there. That is more against the law than the fact of a U. S. sheriff goin' across lookin' for 'em. And when all is said and done—what does Piñon amount to? Jist another of them little Mexican villages, more outlaw than law-abidin'. That gaudy old Mendez runs it. What does the law mean to him—even Mexican law? There ain't even a point of entry to his town."

"That's true enough. Half a dozen good shots could take the town."

"Four," corrected Goober, grinning. "I've done it with one feller."

"Smoky'd like it."

"Johnny would love it."

"Let's go git a drink, Goober—I'm pretty dry."

CHAPTER XVIII.

GUARDED BY YAQUIS.

THE room was about twenty feet long by fifteen feet in width. There was one door of heavy, hand-hewed oak, reënforced crudely with wrought iron, and one window,

guarded on the outside with a heavy iron grille, looking out at an unused patio, where the grass grew rank between the flagged walks. Beyond the patio was a blank wall, slowly falling apart from weather and old age.

There was one old bed, a crude four-poster, some homemade chairs of oak and rawhide. The bedding was plentiful, but none too clean. In one corner was a small fireplace, and on her knees in front of it was an old, toothless Yaqui squaw, trying in a fumbling way to light a fire.

Seated on the bed was Mrs. Austin, chin in hands, indifferently watching the old squaw, while Betty Austin stood at the window, looking out at the fading light of the old patio. Just inside the door, which was closed, stood a Yaqui Indian, rifle in hand, a perpetual scowl on his ugly countenance.

"There is no use trying to get information from her, mother," said Betty wearily, without turning her head. "In the first place, I do not believe she understands a word of English, and in the second place—" Betty hesitated for a moment. "In the second place, I do not believe she has a tongue."

"No tongue? Why, Betty, how in the world—"

Betty turned to the Yaqui warrior, pointed at the old squaw, and asked him:

"No *lengua?*"

The scowl deepened. He ran out his own tongue, slashed at it with the edge of his hand, smiled wickedly, and said:

"*No tiene lengua.*"

"I suppose that is one way of curing a woman of talking too much," said Betty.

"I didn't know you spoke Spanish, Betty."

Betty laughed shortly. "I studied Spanish two years, if you remember."

"So you did. See if that guard will answer any questions."

Betty turned from the window, started to speak, checked herself. The old squaw shuffled away from the fire, and the guard started to open the door.

"Hurry, Betty!" exclaimed her mother.

"No use," laughed Betty. "All I can think of is, 'I see the cat. Can you see the cat? The cat has fur.'"

"What cat?"

"Oh, any cat."

The door closed and the old lock rasped creakingly. The fire made it a little more cheerful, and Betty drew one of the chairs up to the warmth.

"Why doesn't somebody come and get us?" muttered Mrs. Austin. "It seems ages and ages; a nightmare that never seems to end."

"If they would only tell us why," sighed Betty. "Perhaps we have little to complain about. There is plenty of food, such as it is, and we have never been molested."

"It is a wonder we were not both killed. I shall never forget those plunging horses, the buggy overturning, those shots. I know Mr. Riecho was killed—murdered. I saw his limbs twitching. Oh, I'll never forget that."

"Yes, I suppose he was killed, mother. But even in tragedy there is comedy. I shall never forget how you looked when they took that sack off your head. You were as white as a ghost, even your hair—like a marble statue."

"I do not think it was anything to laugh at. The flour is still in my hair."

Betty chuckled, and her mother gave her a reproving glance.

"You might at least be serious. Think of our predicament."

"I have been thinking of it, mother; but what is the good of thinking? We do not know where we are nor what is to be done with us. We are not physically uncomfortable."

"The optimism of youth," sighed Mrs. Austin. "Oh, why doesn't Frank find us? We both look terrible. No change of clothing, no water, not even a hairbrush."

"And a maid without a tongue," added Betty. "As for dad's finding us, I do not suppose he has any idea where we are."

"But they should do something. Surely the officers—"

"Suppose we are in Mexico. What can the officers do?"

"You don't suppose we are in Mexico, do you, Betty?"

"I believe we are. Everything points to that fact, mother."

"But why in Mexico?"

"Goodness only knows; but that is my belief."

MRS. AUSTIN started to speak, but a sound at the door made her pause. The huge lock creaked, the door swung open to admit two Yaqui Indians, lugging what seemed to be parts of a bed. A third Yaqui, the scowling one, stepped inside and took his place near the doorway, while the others proceeded to assemble the bed. Finished with that, they went out and brought in blankets.

The guard spoke to them in a mixture of Spanish and Yaqui, and they went out, leaving him on guard, backed against the wall like a statue, his rifle held in the crook of his left elbow.

"It—it begins to look as though we were going to have company," said Betty a bit fearfully.

Except for the crackling of the fire, the room was silent. Came the shuffle of feet, and a black-garbed figure came in, followed by one of the Yaquis. It was a slender figure, a girl clad in black, a black bandage across her eyes. The Yaqui turned and went out, while the guard stepped over, loosed the bandage, and quickly closed the door behind him.

It was Juana Diaz, blinking around. Betty got to her feet and walked halfway over to her. The light was dim, as the sun had gone down, and the flames flickered on the old adobe walls of the room. Juana stared at Betty, and her eyes strayed to Mrs. Austin on the bed.

Slowly Juana came over toward Betty, her dark eyes wide. "You are Hal's sister?" asked Juana softly.

"Yes, I am Betty Austin."

"How queer," said Juana. "And that is Hal's mother?"

"Yes."

"I am Juana Diaz."

"Juana Diaz—from Indian Wells?"

"Yes."

Juana came over in the stronger light of the fire. She seemed as much at ease as though in her own home.

"You are pretty," said Mrs. Austin.

"I? Oh, no; I am jus' Juana Diaz, the Mexican girl."

Betty was silent. Juana smiled in the fire and sank gracefully down on the shelf of the raised fireplace.

"How queer," she said thoughtfully. "We were to meet in Indian Wells, at my home. But now—we are here, prisoners."

"Do you know where we are, Juana?" asked Betty.

Juana shrugged her shoulders and looked up at Betty. "I'm not sure," she said slowly, "but I think we are in

Piñon. Last night I go to the home of a friend, and when I come home—you see, I always go in back door, and not in front door, which is the *cantina*—two men grab me. I try to scream, but they put a hand over my mouth, and then they tie my hands and put a cloth in my mouth and one over my eyes. Ugh! That cloth does not taste good. Then they put me on a horse and bring me—somewhere. Last night I am all alone—all alone to-day. Now I am here."

"You have seen Hal?" asked Mrs. Austin anxiously.

"Yesterday, Señora Austin."

"Is he worried about us?"

"Yes, they all worried. Your 'usband is almost crazy."

"You talked with him?"

"No, *señora;* I have never been introduced to him."

"But what is being done to rescue us?"

"What can they do? No one knows where you are."

"But why are you here, Juana?" asked Betty. "Surely there is a reason."

"*Quién sabe?* No one knows the reason. Why am I here? No one told me."

"You do not know who the men were?"

"Just two men. They did not speak. No one has spoken, except a Yaqui, and he does not talk except to give an order."

"But what makes you think we are in Piñon?" asked Betty.

"Because this is Mejico—Mexico. I know all this country. Piñon is nearest town in Mexico from Indian Wells, and I know about how long I rode on horse. It was long enough to come to Piñon."

"Who do you know in Piñon?"

"Well," Juana laughed softly, "I have an uncle in Piñon. His name is Porfiro Mendez, but they call him Lobo. That means 'Wolf.'"

"Would he steal you?" asked Mrs. Austin anxiously.

"Porfiro Mendez would steal anything, Señora Austin."

"Your mother's brother?"

"No! He married my mother's sister. They were twins, *señora.* My mother married a Diaz."

"Was he a good man?"

"Well"—Juana rubbed her shapely nose with a slim forefinger—"he must have been good to steal so many horses and not get hung."

BETTY laughed outright at Juana's naïve reply, but her mother seemed a bit shocked. The idea of Hal's wanting to marry the daughter of a horse thief!

"Where is your father now, Juana?" asked Betty, smiling into the flames.

"Nobody knows. Mother never speaks of him."

"I should hope not," said Mrs. Austin.

Juana clasped her slim hands over her knees, smiling at a recollection.

"Porfiro Mendez told me about my father," she said. "Porfiro speaks English very queerly you know. I asked him about my father, and he said that my mother sent him word that her husband did not treat her well. Porfiro said to me: 'So I'm come over and I'm say to heem, "Diaz, I'm come for run hell out from you, biccause you not trit Rosita ver' good." Thees Diaz scare' from Porfiro Mendez, and he's start ronning. I chase heem over top of Yaqui Mountain, and he's keep on going. *Madre de Dios,* thees man can ron fas'!'"

The imitation was perfect, and Juana laughed gleefully.

"Is it all true?" asked Mrs. Austin.

Juana sobered quickly. "You have read the story of Jonah and that big feesh, *señora?*"

"Certainly."

"Do you believe it?"

"Well, I—I suppose we must."

"Then," sadly, "you would learn many things from Porfiro Mendez—and believe them."

"You evidently have little faith in the veracity of your uncle," laughed Betty.

"Veracity? That means truth? I think he is damn' liar, *señorita.*"

"At least you are perfectly frank," sighed Mrs. Austin.

"Do you suppose your mother knows where you are, Juana?" asked Betty.

"How would she know? I do not understand why it was done. Last evening Señor Austin came to the Casa del Diaz—alone. Porfiro Mendez came, and they talked together, until both became angry, and Señor Austin struck Porfiro a terrible blow, knocking him down. Then Señor Austin left the patio, and in a little while Porfiro was able to depart. My mother said she did not know what was said between them, but she was very angry with Porfiro and told him never to return."

Mrs. Austin groaned rather dismally. "I detest brawls."

"I think Porfiro does, too," laughed Juana. "I found one of his teeth on the patio floor. And poor Porfiro was so proud of his teeth."

"But what is to become of us?" sighed Mrs. Austin. "It seems to me that the government should take a hand in this matter."

Juana smiled and shook her head. "You must remember that there is no duty on importing white women into Mejico."

CHAPTER XIX.

GATHERING STORM.

THE little village of Piñon was one of the most picturesque places in Mexico, but little known. Too far from the border and beaten trails, it had kept its identity. One main street, about three blocks long, no building more than two stories high, no sidewalks; dusty streets, every feature typical of Old Mexico. It was a village of little commerce, but much siesta. Looking white at a distance in the sunlight, a closer inspection showed the many colored walls of ancient adobe, old hand-made tile roofs, quaint architecture.

Such was the town of Piñon, which Porfiro Mendez ruled as *alcalde*. His was the supreme word, and he had enough personal followers to enforce any order he might give. The rest of Mexico seemed to have forgotten Piñon; and Porfiro was glad. He collected the taxes in the name of the government, and spent them in his own name. No one cared, it seemed. And if any one did, and aired his grievances, he simply paid more—in the name of the government.

Porfiro's home was the best in town, situated but a short distance from the main street. A rambling old two-story adobe, with many wings and thick walls, the whole was surrounded with a huge wall capable of withstanding any ordinary siege.

Just now Porfiro Mendez did not look like the king of Piñon. He sat in a huge, hand-carved chair, nursing his

split and swollen lips, while he steeped his feelings in *tequila*. He had lost a front tooth from his upper jaw, and the two lower ones in front were wobbly. The bottle emptied, he threw it at a door across the room, from where it rebounded, making a great clatter.

The door opened, and Ricardo Gonzales, slightly blear-eyed from too much *vino*, bowed drunkenly, a good and faithful servant, even if drunk.

"*Tequila!*" roared Mendez, lisping a trifle, due to missing and loose teeth. "And send your brother to me at once."

"Yezzir," said Ricardo.

Miguel came in and owlishly looked Mendez over, but Porfiro merely stared back at him sullenly and waited until Ricardo came stumbling in with a fresh bottle of *tequila*, which he clumsily uncorked and placed before Mendez.

Mendez shifted his bloodshot eyes from the bottle to Miguel.

"Well?" he snarled.

"I'm leesten t'rough from the weendow," began Miguel. "These woman—"

"Talk *español!*"

Miguel swallowed heavily, and began in Spanish:

"I could hear little. The women did not know where they were, but Juana says they are in Piñon. She said you were a thief and would steal anything. She said—"

"*Loco bobo!* You would hear things of no import. Go to Indian Wells and see what you may hear—both of you. If there is news of importance, you may disturb me, but not otherwise."

They went back to their own room, finished up the bottle of *vino*, and prepared for the ride to Indian Wells.

"I'm been theenk quite a lot," stated Miguel, missing his head with his big hat, but finally getting it on.

"Good! I'm glad to hear from that, Mike. W'at you theenk?"

"I'm theenk," solemnly, "that eef these *Americanos* fin' out we got those weemen, we bot' get 'ung."

"Mm-m-m-ha. That ees sometheeng wort' theenk 'bout. W'at you s'pose Porfiro steal them womens for, eh? Yo'ng one wort' look at, but ol' one not wort' damn. W'y he steal Juana?"

"Porfiro goin' marry wit' Juana."

"'Ow you know thees theeng?"

"Make guess."

"Huh! That all right. But them w'ite womens make me scare. Bimeby t'ree, four cowboy come down 'ere—*wham, bam, bam!* W'ere we be, eh?"

"Porfiro feex everything."

"Sure. He be beeg 'elp to me w'en somebody got rope on my neck. He's say, 'Take off de rope.' Cowboy say, '*Bien.*' Yes?"

"You see," Mike stated owlishly. "Porfiro save you."

"Porfiro save de rope—but I'm dead like hell. Come on."

IT was nearly noon of the following day when a rig drew up at the Star A ranch house, and Edward Chandler, the prosecuting attorney from Silver Bar, and another tall, lean, hard-faced man climbed down stiffly. Cal Sands, down at the corral with Dave Elkinson, saw the lawyer and swore angrily.

"What's the matter?" asked Dave anxiously.

"Oh, that damn attorney from Silver Bar, nosin' around again. Looks like Buck Reed with him. I wonder if they've appointed Reed to serve out Nolan's time."

"He's one salty gent," observed Dave. "A good man to let alone."

Sands nodded coldly, as he saw Frank Austin come out on the porch. Austin knew Chandler, who introduced Buck Reed as the new sheriff.

"Quite a drive out here from Silver Bar," said Austin. "Come in."

"Let's sit out here," suggested Chandler. "We just wanted to talk with you a little—about something that happened over in our town one night."

Austin's jaw tightened for a moment, as they sat down.

"What—" Austin paused.

"Where's your son, Austin?" asked the sheriff.

"I—I think he's in Indian Wells. Do you want him?"

"Not yet. You do the talkin', Ed."

The lawyer cleared his throat raspingly.

"Austin, how much did you pay Nolan to cover that killin'?" he shot.

Austin's color faded quickly, but he was game.

"Who said I paid anything?"

"I am not at liberty to divulge names."

"Meaning that you can't prove I paid a cent."

"That remains to be seen, Austin. Slade was a detective."

"What of it?"

"Chance shot," smiled Chandler. "I wasn't sure before. Of course, you know Slade was shot in the back—murdered."

Austin was prepared for this, and did not flinch.

"I wired San Francisco to examine the body," continued the lawyer, "and they wired back that the body had been cremated."

Austin took a deep breath of relief, which turned quickly to dismay as Chandler said slowly:

"I don't like murder, Austin; so I worked a little frame-up on the coroner, who confessed to his part in the matter. I think he is willing to go on the stand and swear Slade was murdered. But here's the queer part—he swears you never paid him a cent."

"Well, I—I—" Austin choked. "Damn it, you can't prove a thing!" he finally blurted.

"It is a case of *corpus delicti,* I will admit. Nolan was guilty of helping cover the real crime; but Nolan is dead. If you gave the money to him, he failed to split with the coroner, unless the coroner lies about it."

"I never gave anybody—any officer money," protested Austin.

"You drew five thousand dollars on the day of the inquest."

"Why shouldn't I? Damn it, what is five thousand to me?"

"True enough," admitted the lawyer.

"Any word from yore wife and daughter?" asked Reed.

"Not a word. You'll have to excuse me if I act queerly. I—I can't even think clearly."

"I appreciate your feelings," replied Chandler. "But in spite of all that, I believe I have enough evidence on which to prosecute. It is a nasty little deal, and I am going to clear it up. If your son is innocent, I'm sure he would rather be exonerated in court than to go on—"

"You—you are going to arrest Hal?" asked Austin weakly.

"I am not, but I shall have it done," Reed stated firmly. "You see, this is not my county, Mr. Austin."

FRANK AUSTIN sat there dumbly and watched them turn the team around and start toward Keno City. As soon as they were gone, Cal Sands came sauntering up from the corral, looking quizzically at Austin.

"What did them d a m n' buzzards want, Frank?" he asked curiously.

"Them damn' buzzards, as you call them, have gone to Keno City to get La Plante to arrest Hal for murder."

"What are you talkin' about?"

"The coroner confessed."

"Confessed?"

Austin nodded slowly. "He confessed that Slade was murdered, but swears he never got a cent from me for helping cover it up."

"Well, you — that shouldn't make you mad. Clears you all right."

"But you gave it to him, didn't you?"

Sands said nothing for several moments, but his brain was busy.

"No," he said; "I gave it to Nolan; he was to make the split."

"Well, that's lucky, at least. Nolan's dead; so they can't question him."

"I wonder if Chandler could be bought."

"None of that," groaned Austin. "I paid five thousand to make a good fellow out of myself. Then I gave you five hundred to buy Rosita Diaz, and you got knocked down and robbed."

"That was hard on me, too," Sands smiled grimly. "I suppose she had some of her friends planted out behind the house, and they got the money without makin' any promises."

"Anyway," Austin said wearily, "I'm not going to buy Chandler. It will probably cost me a lot more than Chandler's price, to hire a good criminal lawyer, but I'll at least know the money was earned. Damn it, this is a terrible mess, any way you look at it. Cal, what ever became of Hal's gun the night of the shooting?"

"I don't know. Nolan says he was never able to find it."

Austin thought for a moment. At last he turned to the other matter that was agitating his mind. "Did you say anything to the rest of the boys about going into Mexico to-night?"

"Shore; they're ready. We don't want to go down much before dark. That is, we don't want to reach Indian Wells before dark. If Mendez has anything to do with this deal, he'll have Indian Wells watched. We've got to be careful. I'll be damned if I want to run up against a dozen Yaquis, armed with Mausers. They don't love a gringo—and they can shoot."

Austin nodded in agreement.

GOOBER GLENDON and Johnny Wells were in Keno City, when Chandler and Reed came back from the Star A and went to the sheriff's office, where they held a long conversation with Pete La Plante, and afterward went to the courthouse. Goober did not suspect what it was about, until the Keno City sheriff told him that Chandler had sworn out a warrant for the arrest of Hal Austin, charging him with murder, and giving the warrant to La Plante. Pete did not relish the job. He had known Hal pretty well, and he liked the kid. Goober rubbed his grizzled chin and thought it over.

"How about lettin' that go for a day or so, Pete?" he asked.

"Well, there ain't no time limit on it," smiled La Plante. "Are yuh still hankerin' to go down to Piñon?"

"I shore am."

"Smoky said it was jist the kind of a holiday he needed. I hope to gosh that Smoky gits a bellyful of fight some day, and I'm pretty sure he'll be goin' to the place where they manufacture trouble. What time do we start?"

"Me and Johnny will go down early, and you show up with Smoky after dark. We don't want to do any-

thin' that might look suspicious. We can slip out of Indian Wells in the dark, and nobody will know where we've gone."

"Good idea."

"And yuh can leave yore badge at home, Pete. Be a good alibi if anybody asks yuh why yuh didn't arrest Hal Austin to-night."

Pete laughed softly. "I don't need any alibi, Goober."

It was mid afternoon when Goober and Johnny arrived at Indian Wells. They did not stable their horses, but tied them on the main street, and loafed around until they saw Hal. He was going to the Casa del Diaz; so they followed him over. He was at a table in the patio, and nodded to them.

"Any news?" asked Goober.

Hal shook his head and motioned for Goober to sit down with him. Johnny got some crackers and proceeded to make friends with a red and blue parrot, while Goober proceeded to tell Hal about the warrant. Hal listened gravely.

"How much of a case do you think they've got against me?" he asked.

"Enough to keep yuh in jail until next term of court."

"I suppose that's true; but I'm as innocent as you are."

Goober knew this to be the truth, but he also was aware that it might be difficult to prove. He led Hal to talk about things at the ranch before trouble came his way.

"Do the boys do much rifle practice out there?" asked Goober.

"Not so very much. Dave Elkinson is a good shot. They used to take my money away regularly, but I found out later that the sights on their rifles were not accurate. They allowed for that, of course. Rather a crooked way of taking my money, wasn't it?

"But I got even. Sands traded rifles with one of the men at the 7 Bar 7, and I tried it out the first day, when no one else was there. I made a rest on a sack of sand and an old table, and I found that it threw about three inches high and about the same distance to the right at a hundred yards. I won most of my money back on one bet."

"What caliber was it?" queried Goober.

"Thirty-thirty."

Goober grinned thoughtfully, and felt of the empty thirty-thirty shells in his pocket. Rosita came through the patio and shook hands solemnly with Goober, who grinned with delight.

"She's a peach," said Hal, after Rosita left them.

Goober nodded slowly.

"Did you know Diaz?" asked Hal.

"Diaz?"

"Juana's father."

"Oh! No, I didn't know him," Goober said.

"YOU knew Rosita and her sister a long time ago, didn't you?" Hal inquired.

"Almost as long as you are old—mebby longer."

"The sister was the wife of Porfiro Mendez."

"Yeah. Twin sisters; I knew 'em both. Couple pretty Mexican girls."

"Do you know anything about Mendez?" Hal asked.

"Only what I've heard. He married one of the girls and took her down into Mexico. I dunno what happened to her."

"Juana told me some of it," Hal explained. "It seems that Mendez mistreated her as long as she could stand it, and then she ran away and came up here to her sister. Mendez didn't

know what became of her, I guess. Anyway, a baby was born, and Mrs. Mendez died. Later the baby died. I've seen their graves."

"Do you think Mendez had anythin' to do with the disappearance of Juana Diaz?" asked Goober.

"I don't know. Before she disappeared my father met Mendez in here. They had words, and my father knocked him down. I believe dad knocked some of his teeth out. Mrs. Diaz must have heard some of the quarrel, because she told Mendez to never come here again. You see, Mendez wanted to marry Juana."

"Well, the fat old son of a sea cook! Wanted to marry her, eh?"

"Yes."

"Hm-m-m-m. I wonder what yore father and Mendez quarreled over."

"I have no idea. Mrs. Diaz refused to tell me."

"Mendez has quite a followin' down in his town, I understand."

"I suppose he has. He always has the Gonzales brothers with him, as sort of a bodyguard. They are known as a tough pair—and look it. And how they can murder the king's English . . . If I only knew where Juana is! . . . Dad and I had just about broken off diplomatic relationship. He wants me to come back to the ranch, but I refuse to live around Cal Sands. It isn't right for us to be separated just now, but I can't help it. He prefers Sands to me."

"It's shore funny there ain't no word from yore mother and sister."

"I don't understand it. If it's ransom they want, why don't they ask for it? Mr. Glendon, I'm beginning to fear it is worse than that."

"Well, there's plenty time to cross a bridge when yuh come to it. Wait a while and somethin' will happen."

"You mean—you know something will happen?"

"If it don't, you can cross me off, as a bum prophet, kid."

THEY left Hal at the Casa, and went back to the street, where they saw Ricardo and Miguel. The brothers had consumed much wine and were mellow, but Goober and Johnny knew they were in Indian Wells for a purpose. There were several Yaqui Indians in evidence, apparently unarmed, but no one could tell what was under their dirty *serapes*.

It was nearly dark when Dave Elkinson and Hank Britton of the Star A rode in and tied their horses in front of a *cantina* about midway of the street. Both men had holstered rifles on their saddles. They nodded to Goober and Johnny and went into the bar.

Goober grew serious, wondering what those two were doing in town, carrying rifles on their saddles. Darkness had settled down over the town when Frank Austin and Cal Sands rode in. Goober and Johnny saw them dismount, in the light from a *cantina* window.

"What's comin' off, I wonder?" muttered Goober, as they sauntered down the street and took a look at the two horses.

He and Johnny stood back in the shadow for a while, and finally the two men came out. They conversed in low tones for several moments, and separated, Sands going down the street toward the *cantina*, where Elkinson and Britton were, while Austin apparently started for the Casa del Diaz.

Hal left the Casa before his father reached there, and had started for the stable where he kept his horse, when a

little Mexican stepped from the shadows near the Casa and spoke his name.

"I am Hal Austin," replied Hal, a little startled. The Mexican drew a folded note from under his *serape* and handed it to him.

"*Carta, señor.*"

Hal unfolded it, lighted a match, and read it quickly.

DEAR HAL:

Follow the bearer and come alone to us. BETTY.

"Who gave you this?" asked Hal sharply.

"*No entiendo, señor.*"

"I suppose you don't understand. Still, that is Betty's writing. Have you a horse?"

"*Si, señor.*"

"All right. Wait for me at the end of the street."

Goober and Johnny saw Hal ride past, but he did not see them, and they did not see him join the little Mexican guide at the end of the street. They wondered where he could be going, but were not greatly interested.

Frank Austin had gone searching for Hal. He wanted to tell Hal that the prosecuting attorney from Silver Bar had sworn out a warrant for his arrest. Austin was sick over the whole affair, but he wanted to assure Hal that he was behind him.

But Hal was not in the *cantina* nor the patio. Several others were in the patio, eating by the light of candles, but Hal was not there. Austin questioned one of the orchestra, and the man said Hal had but left there.

Austin went out, intending to search for Hal, but his intentions were ruined quickly, when two men stepped from the shadows, prodded him with their guns, and quickly took his gun away.

"No noise, *señor*," warned one of them. "We do not order twice."

Austin swore to himself as they escorted him away from the town, where they found three saddled horses behind a ruined adobe. Forcing him to mount, they swiftly roped him on, gagged and blindfolded him, and rode away with him, leading his horse.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.

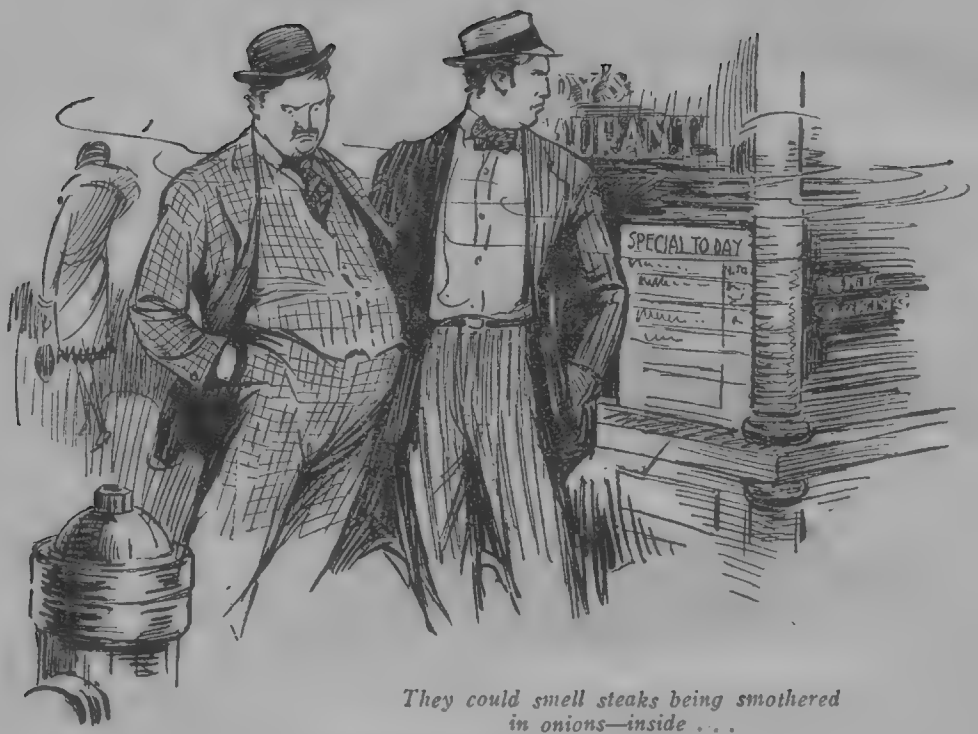
The Burning Bush of Corsica

A BUSH that burns yet remains unconsumed may be found growing to-day in the Mediterranean island of Corsica. A lighted match tossed near the shrub will start a fire that flares up for a moment and then vanishes almost as suddenly without doing any harm.

This remarkable shrub, called the *maqui*, has numerous glands on its surface which produce a strong-smelling oil. When this evaporates, it forms with the air a mixture almost as inflammable as the explosive fumes of gasoline. When ignited there is a sudden burst of flame that flashes up around the shrub and is gone again in a moment. It does not last long enough to do any damage to the shrub beyond a slight scorching of some of the oil glands.

Whatever may be the purpose of this oily secretion—whether to protect the shrub from the effects of the hot Mediterranean sun or from possible damage by animals—it certainly has the effect of startling any traveler who accidentally sets fire to this "burning bush."

John H. Spicer.



They could smell steaks being smothered in onions—inside . . .

The Clutch of Circumstance

A certain place is paved with good intentions, they say—and drifters Bill and Jim caught just that when they tried to play good Samaritans

By JOHN H. THOMPSON

"THERE ought to be a law against leaving restaurant doors open when steaks are being smothered in onions inside and hungry drifters are barging along outside," declared Bill indignantly as he whiffed the air longingly and tightened his belt.

"Speaking of laws," I chuckled. "Look't where some goop parked his car—right in front of a hydrant." I pointed to the big sedan drawn up to the curb.

"If a cop comes—holy mackerel, here comes one now!"

When a guy has been peddling Indian oil under gasoline torches as long as Bill has been, he acquires the faculty of spotting brass buttons a mile away. The cop had just rounded the corner three blocks distant, but he was headed our way and if Bill had been engaged in giving his spiel he would have started dousing his torch and folding his stand.

"A tag for some careless sucker and two dollars for the coffers of the suffering taxpayers," remarked Bill. "Either two dollars or a summons. Gol-ding it, I'm going to move that car if it isn't locked. There's a space farther along where I can squeeze it in. Maybe we can pull down a reward."

I'm no lawyer, but a guy doesn't have to be a lawyer to know that the sentence for tampering with another person's car is a matter of years, while the sentence for parking in front of a hydrant is measured by days. I figured it would be better for a careless motorist to spend a week-end counting the bars on a cell door than for Bill and me to spend a season or two doing it.

But Bill is one of those birds who thinks he can get in solid with Lady Luck by flirting with Dame Trouble.

"We're O. K.," declared Bill reassuringly. "The cop wouldn't yank us in for touching the car unless a complaint was made and the guy who left the car in front of the hydrant will be so grateful to us that he won't make a complaint."

"Look—the car isn't locked. Probably he just ran into one of these buildings for a minute trusting to luck no officer would blow along. Either that or he didn't spot the hydrant. We'll save him—'cast yourself on troubled waters and two bowls of soup may come floating to the surface,' as the old copybook gag used to say."

"Yeh, we'll cast ourselves on troubled waters and only a few bubbles will came floating to the surface," I interposed sarcastically.

"Come on, move quick," urged Bill. "That cop is heading this way fast. All we have to do is to horn the car into that space between those two sedans down there."

WITHOUT further ado he opened the door and crawled into the driver's seat.

I decided that if one of us was going to jail we might as well shoot the works, so I clambered in alongside him.

"Can you drive the danged thing?"

"I can drive anything," declared Bill airily. "Didn't we used to own a car? Remember that old junk box we bought for ten dollars?" He chuckled reminiscently and stepped on the starter. She roared into life immediately, and he grabbed the gear shift lever.

There was a grinding roar—just about the kind of a noise that a sausage grinder would make if little Willie were to toss his iron trains into it.

Bill had forgotten to push in the clutch!

He fumbled with the levers for a moment. The car did not move. Bill's face blanched.

"Suffering calliopes, Jim, I guess I've stripped the gears," he groaned. "The car won't move."

"Then it's up to us to move and move fast!" I declared emphatically. Without further ado I swung the door open and hurriedly clambered out. Bill was so close behind me that he stepped on my heels. We knew that if the owner of the car blew out and discovered what damage had been done he would be apt to start asking questions.

I glanced up the street. The policeman was now less than a block away, coming along swinging his traffic whistle and leisurely eying the cars parked along the curb.

"Here's where this guy gets a tag," said Bill.

"Oh, well, a tag will take his mind off his other troubles," I pointed out cheerfully. "Stripped gears are a luxury that only the rich can afford. The —what in thunder!"

I had been rudely hurled to one side. A man shot past me across the walk. Then two others, one of them colliding with Bill with such force that Bill had to grab the hydrant to keep from falling. The three newcomers unceremoniously hurled themselves into the car. The doors slammed. The engine

roared. The car however, did not budge. The man on the driver's seat was fumbling desperately with the gear shift, and you could hear them swear even above the grinding of those stripped gears.

"Come on, Bill," I exclaimed. "If a guy uses language like that to the car, what would he say to us if he found out it was you who put the thing on the blink?"

We turned to go but paused as shouts sounded overhead. We looked up. A wild-eyed individual was leaning way out of a window hollering. We couldn't hear what he was saying, but whatever it was it must of been of supreme importance. An instant later two shirt-sleeved figures came tearing out of the doorway from which the three motorists had emerged so hurriedly a few seconds before.

"Holy mackerel, Jim," g r o a n e d Bill. "I guess the building's afire. The trucks will be coming and the firemen will be blocked from the hydrant."

The doors of the sedan were flung open and the three motorists came tumbling out.

A shot rang out. The wild-eyed individual up at the window apparently was becoming excited.

"All right, buddy, we'll turn in an alarm," Bill called up reassuringly, but his voice was drowned out by the din of traffic.

BEFORE we had taken a step, another shot rang out. There was the shrill scream of a police whistle. People seemed to spring up out of the ground. We were surrounded and in the center of a circle of excited people were the two shirt-sleeved individuals desperately struggling with two of the motorists. The third motorist tried to push past Bill and me. I recognized him as the man who had been at the wheel.

"Just a minute, stranger, stick by your pals," said Bill curtly. "You were driving. It must have been you who left the car there."

The stranger cursed and shoved Bill aside. He was altogether too rough with my poor old pal, so I clipped him a blow which sent him reeling to the walk. Something clattered from his hand. I picked it up. It was a deadly-looking automatic!

Rolling about at our feet were the two shirt-sleeved men and the other two motorists, snarling and tearing at each other like a pack of dogs. The driver tried to edge into the battle, but Bill roughly shoved him back.

The crowd parted and the policeman came shoving his way through.

He expertly swung a leather-covered billy several times and the three motorists were rendered hors de combat, while the two shirt-sleeved men, disheveled and panting, struggled to their knees.

The policeman eyed Bill and me speculatively, the billy still clutched belligerently in his hand.

"Who are you?" he demanded aggressively.

"We're nobody, neither of us," said Bill meekly.

"Wot you doing with the gun?" The query was directed at me.

I meekly handed the weapon over. "One of these men dropped it." I indicated the helpless trio.

In the distance sounded the clanging of a gong. A surging crowd pressed about us, hemming us in.

"If they make a fuss like this when a car is parked in front of a hydrant, what in thunder would they do if a fellow passed a traffic light?" muttered Bill irritably to me.

"There's no need of us waiting," I suggested.

"That's a good idea. Let's go," agreed Bill.

The policeman, however, barred our way. "You two stay right here," he ordered curtly.

We stayed. I believe in staying while the staying is good.

The clanging gong drew nearer. One wedge of the crowd scattered and a patrol wagon appeared. Half a dozen blue-coated officers poured out of the end, and expertly started pushing the crowd back. Bill and I would have been willing to be pushed with the rest, but we had to stay in the center with the policeman.

We pretended we did not hear the comments and speculations of the spectators on the inside rim of the ring. Opinion seemed about evenly divided as to whether we were murderers or just common ordinary everyday crooks. We wondered how long it'd be before somebody made unpleasant inquiries about wrecked gears.

A new arrival burst through the ring. It was the wild-eyed individual who had been leaning out of the window.

"There's the guy who fired the opening shot in the great battle," said Bill peevishly, pointing at him.

"Shut up, you," snapped the policeman.

Bill meekly shut up. Ordinarily he is strong on arguing about his constitutional rights of free speech, but the time for a man to argue about such trivial things as constitutional rights is not immediately after he has ruined a stranger's car and brought all the forces of civic righteousness clattering down on his ivory head. That's the time to keep quiet, sit tight and let nature take its course. For a wonder, Bill had the sense to recognize that.

THE wild-eyed individual didn't stop to chat. He unceremoniously jumped over the prostrate forms of the three motorists, two of whom were beginning to show signs of life, and flung open the rear door of the sedan. He leaned inside and came up smiling triumphantly, with a leather valise clutched in his hand. Standing on the running board he examined the contents of the valise.

"It seems to be all here, officer," he exclaimed in relief. "Fifty thousand dollars. These three men"—he indicated the helpless trio—"came into the office, locked us in the inner room, grabbed the pay roll and rushed out. They'd have made a clean get-away, but for some reason or other they couldn't start their car. The minute or two that they lost was all we needed, and they were cornered."

"And these two fellows?" the policeman pointed to Bill and me. "Were they in the gang?"

The erstwhile wild-eyed individual eyed us hostilely.

"Maybe they were the outside men, watching the car while the other three pulled off the hold-up," he offered cheerfully.

That was Bill's cue and he grabbed it avidly. He told the story of what had happened.

Well, speaking of embellishments, the two dinners we tucked away later in the afternoon would have made two bowls of soup look as unsatisfying as two spots of gravy on a Sunday vest. They were dinners which were fitting monuments to the gratitude of a man whose fifty thousand-dollar pay roll has been saved from a fade-out.

THE END.

"Now walk over to this door!" he commanded quietly

The Radio Menace

With their backs to the wall, the little band who are roused to the peril of America fight in the dark against treachery and the astounding scientific weapons of the robot-souled invaders

By RALPH MILNE FARLEY

Author of "The Radio Gun Runners," "The Radio Flyers," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

THE kidnaping of Assistant District Attorney Eliot Endicott leads his cousin Helyn Kent, her criminal lawyer father Blackstone Kent, reporter Lawrence Larrabee of the Boston *Post*, and his aviator friend Jack Blakeslee to the discovery of a fearful plot to overturn America's government

Aaron Cohen, a classmate of Endicott's, had chanced to get in touch by radio with the rulers of a country on the planet Venus. By the wireless transmission of matter, they came to this country: the gray pterodactyl or winged dragon, Boomalayla; the giant black antman, Doggo; and Princess Quivven the Goldenflame, a beautiful girl covered with a soft golden fur.

They immediately begin recruiting

This story began in the Argosy for June 7.

an army of unemployed, turning them into robots, blindly obedient automatons or "Whoomangs," by inserting a moth-grub at the base of their brains. This grub, which the Whoomangs call a new-soul, can also make animals or birds amazingly intelligent tools of the organization.

Larrabee, Kent, and Blakeslee manage to get inside one of the Whoomang camps, and free Endicott. But in the fight, Doggo and Quivven escape by the wireless route, taking Helyn Kent with them. Blakeslee has disappeared. Cohen, betrayed by the Whoomangs, dies in the act of killing the dragon Boomalayla.

Larry and Blackstone Kent fly to Washington, and finally manage to half convince the Attorney-General of the existence of the Whoomangs and their intention to strike in a few days. There are Whoomangs among the Federal officials and even in the Cabinet, consequently all must be done secretly.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE BATTLE IN THE BARN.

CURIOUS things were taking place in a supposedly vacant barn belonging to the Rock Creek Park system, near the northern boundary of the District of Columbia. Under cover of darkness, five men arrived in a high-powered car. Furtively they unlocked the building. Up into the lofts they went, one of them carrying a large bundle. All of them had flash lights. Then one of them opened an upstairs outside door, facing away from the road. The man who did this reached through the door and hung something just outside.

Taking pitchforks, they shoveled away certain piles of hay in the loft, uncovering various bits of machinery swathed in dusty canvas.

First they hauled out some sectional masts, hoisted them up to the cupola, pushed them out onto the roof, and erected them in sockets at the two ends of the ridgepole. A lobster-pot aërial was then strung between the masts and a wire run down into the building. They also connected up some underground wires which ran to other antennæ, already up, concealed in the near-by woods.

Other machinery was dug out of the concealing hay: a gasoline motor-generator set, a string of incandescent light bulbs, a switch panel, and a curtained cubicle containing three coördinate axes of some strange pale iridescent metal. All these were set up, and properly wired together. The men worked with a precision born of long experience.

The motor-generator set was put in motion, the electric lights were turned on, and one of the five men stationed himself at the switch panel, put earphones on his head, and began to adjust the variable capacities and variable inductances to his satisfaction. He called several stations, and conversed with them in low, guarded tones.

Meanwhile his four companions were uncovering four diabolical-looking machines, part of which resembled searchlights, and were carrying them down to the main floor of the barn.

At last the man at the panel announced, "All adjusted for matter-transmission."

Back spoke his earphones, "Stand by to receive."

He closed certain switches. A strange glow came through the cracks of the curtained cubicle.

"All ready," he replied, and turned his attention to a dial on his panel.

The needle of the dial swung from a position marked "Off" to one marked "On." Then, after about four seconds, it swung back to "Off" again. Instantly the young man opened the switches on the panel.

The light of the cubicle died, the curtains parted, and a huge black ant, several feet in length, clattered out. One of the other men had meanwhile come up from downstairs, and now produced a complicated set of radio apparatus, which he strapped to the head and thorax of the huge beast. For, of course, the antman could not carry his radio set with him, as the matter-transmitter would not transmit metals.

When this apparatus had been properly adjusted and tuned, the antman boomed forth, "Who is in charge here?"

"I am, your highness," replied the young man at the switch panel.

"Your name?"

"John Blake, your highness."

"I shall remember it. You are handling things here very efficiently. After the Great Day has come, I shall see that you are properly rewarded."

"Thank you, your highness."

"And now, where are the death-ray machines?"

"Downstairs, your highness, awaiting the arrival of the operators."

The huge ant lumbered down the stairs, accompanied by the man who had helped him put on his radio set, while the youth returned to his panels.

"Stand by to receive," spoke the earphones.

As before, he threw the switches and replied, "All ready."

When he restored his switches to neutral, Quivven the Goldenflame stepped from the curtains and glanced inquiringly around.

INSTANTLY the young man closed another switch. A sheet of ruddy fire spread across the panel, and it crumpled. The cubicle collapsed into a twisted heap of curtain-cloth and metal rods.

Backing away from the smoldering panel, he whipped out an automatic, and commanded, "Stick 'em up!"

Quivven obeyed.

"One word, and I'll drill you," said the young man quietly. "Now walk over here to this door."

Together the two approached the door which opened into the outside air.

But at just that instant the head of one of the four other men appeared at the top of the loft stairs. The young man fired, and the head disappeared.

Then the ant lumbered into sight. Again the man fired. But it is difficult in the extreme to hit the vital spot of an ant as large as a horse. Calmly disregarding the shots, the antman snatched an automatic from the dead body at the top of the stairs, and fired back.

With a cry of pain, the young man turned away and leaped into space through the black opening in the side wall of the barn.

Quivven rushed to the stairs.

"Quick, men!" she shouted. "Out and get him. Get him at all costs. There's a twenty-foot drop where he jumped, and he's probably broken his neck."

The sound of a departing car was heard as the men dashed out. Presently they returned to announce sheepishly that a trail of blood led from the barn to where their car had been parked. The car was gone.

"John Blake," mused the antman. "Hm!"

But Quivven was in no mood for musing. Downstairs in the barn there was a telephone. Quickly she called and got a certain Virginia number, and began issuing orders with perfect calmness.

Doggo, the antman, stood by her side, and from time to time nodded his assent or offered suggestions.

MEANWHILE a taxicab, carrying four trussed-up prisoners, arrived at a camp in the Virginia mountains, twenty miles or so west of Washington. The camp was a bustle of activity. Hundreds of men under arms. Other hundreds unarmed, standing in a long waiting-line which led to a brightly lighted laboratory. An administration building, surrounded by parked cars. Inside, pigeons and rats and dogs and some unusually alert-faced human-bodied Whoomangs were receiving final orders.

To this building rushed the taxi driver, and reported, "I've got Kent and Larrabee and two men from the Department of Justice tied up in my cab outside."

"Good!" exclaimed one of the tacticians. "Bring them in. Some one send for Swami Singh. We'll soon find out just how much these fellows know of our plans."

So the four prisoners were dragged in. Sheepishly they stood before the desk. The chief Whoomang swept them with his glance. Then he turned furiously to the taxi driver.

"What does this mean?" he shouted. "None of these men is either Kent or Larrabee!"

Then he regained his self-composure. Rajindra Singh entered the building.

"Swami," exclaimed the chief, "find out who these men are and what they know. Be quick about it."

But at just that moment the telephone rang. It was Quivven, calling from the old barn in Rock Creek Park. The questioning of the prisoners was shelved for the moment, to make way for more important activities.

IT was due to Kent's caution that he and Larrabee were not among the captives.

On the way to the office of the Superintendent of Buildings, Kent had faintly caught a glimpse of the back of the head of the taxi driver, and had seen there a telltale scar. When he had gone inside, the first thing that he did was have the superintendent round up all the night attendants of the building. Picking out two who resembled him and Larry in size and age, and slipping each a five-dollar bill to keep them from asking questions, they exchanged clothes.

These two substitutes had been sent in the cab with the two operatives of the Department of Justice.

As soon as the taxi was safely out of sight, Kent and Larrabee and the Assistant Attorney-General had hired another cab, and had set out to inspect all the government barns and storehouses, the least used ones first.

Three or four of these buildings were visited, and developed nothing unusual.

The party were making their way out Sixteenth Street, N. W., just north of the settled part of the city, when they found their way blocked by a large touring car, standing diagonally across the center of the road.

Cautiously Larry got out to investigate, leaving his two companions alertly waiting in the taxicab.

"Only one man here," he shouted back, "and he seems to be asleep or drunk."

The others joined him. Together they pulled the body out of the stalled car. It was a young workingman in overalls, and his clothes were wet with sticky blood. They flashed a light in his face.

Then Larry cried out, "It's Jack Blakeslee!"

Jack was still breathing faintly. The taxi driver produced a flask and forced it between the wounded man's teeth. Jack gulped and opened his eyes.

"Hello, Larry," said he, smiling faintly. "Hell of a note! Doggo shot me. But I wrecked their apparatus first. Quivven's there, too, over in Park Commission's old barn. Only four men with them. Hurry, for they'll go to—"

He coughed hoarsely, then tried again. "They'll go to—"

Another paroxysm of coughing, and Jack's body went limp. Kent put his ear to the airman's chest.

"He's dead," he announced sadly.

Laying the body in the car, they started the engine, and ran it to the edge of the road, where they parked it. Jack's automatic and ammunition they gave to the taxi driver. Then they sped on toward the barn which Jack had mentioned as the Whoomang headquarters in his dying breath.

AS they neared the barn they heard the roar of a motor and saw the lights of a large plane taking off from the ground. When they reached the barn it was deserted. Inside there was a gasoline motor-generator set still running. There was a wrecked panel and a wrecked matter-transmitting apparatus, such as Kent and Larry had seen before at the camp in the Wisconsin woods. A dead man lay at the top of the stairs. But there was no Quivven, no Doggo, no death-ray machines, and no live Whoomangs.

Crestfallen, they carried the two bodies—Jack's and the dead Whoomang's—back to town, dividing their forces at the parked car which Jack had stolen.

Their expedition had failed.

And they were destined to receive another blow that same night. At the hotel Kent found the following telegram awaiting him:

> They raided the camp in a plane and got Eliot Endicott away.
>
> VICTOR CHAPIN.

Kent summed up their accomplishments to date:

"We've wrecked two of their matter-transmitting sets and one of their death-ray machines, and have captured two of their camps. The pterodactyl and Cohen are dead. We have plenty of material now to convince the authorities. But, on the other side of the ledger, we don't know where either Helyn or Eliot is. Jack Blakeslee is dead. And Quivven and Doggo are at large and preparing to strike. Oh, if we could only locate them before it is too late!"

"Too bad we didn't have some one follow our two doubles!" complained Larry. "Then we might have discovered the location of another of their hang-outs."

"Yes, it is," agreed Kent. "Yet, at the time it seemed wiser not to run the risk of making that Whoomang taxi driver suspicious."

He paused for a moment reflectively, then continued, "We have only one day more in which to save America. Yet there's nothing further that we can do to-night. And time so precious, too."

"And meanwhile where is Helyn?" groaned Larry.

CHAPTER XXII.

OVER THE TOP.

THE last that they knew of her was when she had been transmitted away from the Wisconsin woods camp of the Whoomangs, just before Aaron Cohen killed himself and the dragon, and Dr. Polakowski wrecked the matter-transmitting set.

An instant later Helyn duly arrived with her two guards at some other headquarters of the organization, she knew not where. Quivven and Doggo were already in the room as she stepped out of the cubicle. An electrician stood at a panel near by.

"Stand by to receive," droned his earphones.

"All ready," he replied.

From within the cubicle there came a thud and a squawk, and the headless body of the great dragon came tumbling and fluttering out, turning somersaults all over the room, very much like a hen fresh from the chopping block. Everybody gasped and scattered. Confusion reigned.

In the midst of this confusion four of Larry's American soldiers, clad in Whoomang overalls, dashed out of the cubicle. Of course they were unarmed, for the metal parts of their rifles and automatics and cartridges had been left behind, up in Wisconsin. But, in the excitement, the enemy forgot this.

One of the Whoomangs screamed, "Here come the Americans!"

The Whoomangs were prepared for even such an emergency.

"Smoke bomb!" commanded Quivven.

Some one threw the bomb, and all the Whoomangs crowded from the room under cover of the ensuing smoke. So also did the four Americans.

When order had been restored Helyn and the four Americans were nowhere to be found.

Search was then made through the entire camp, but it was some time before the Whoomangs ascertained from an unusually dumb guard at one of the gates, that he had let the five fugitives through on some cock-and-bull excuse. He was so rattled by the frantic cross-questioning to which he was subjected, that he couldn't even remember what that excuse had been.

But all around the camp lay the desolate Virginia mountains. Five persons on foot couldn't have traveled very far in this short time. Accordingly human-minded bloodhounds were led to the gate and put on the trail, and soon the beasts were off into the woods in full cry.

Helyn and her four escorts, far off in the mountains, heard the baying, and redoubled their speed. They found a mountain road, and followed it upward. Nearer and nearer came the sounds of pursuit.

The road led to a little cabin in a clearing. A peculiar sour alcoholic odor filled the air. On the steps of the cabin sat two bearded men. Two rifles leaned against the door-posts.

As the five fugitives dashed across the clearing, the pack of hounds appeared at its edge.

"Quick!" exclaimed Helyn, with a flash of inspiration. "The revenooers are after us."

Then she sank to the ground exhausted. One of the mountaineers spat reflectively.

"Is thet so?" said he, and reached for his rifle.

"Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack!"

One by one, the bloodhounds—there were four of them—dropped in their tracks.

The man blew down his barrel, and leaned the piece against the door-post once more.

"What be you, ma'am?" he asked. "A lady moonshiner?"

Helyn sat up, panting.

"Yes," she gasped. "And these are four of my bootleg truck-drivers."

"Set down, folks," said the mountaineer to Helyn's four companions. "I reckon no one 'll bother ye up hyar."

Nobody did, for the Whoomangs had no more bloodhounds at this camp.

When the five fugitives had recovered their breath, they concocted a story of a wrecked truck and pursuit by the authorities, which convinced the two simple mountaineers.

By guarded questions, they found out what part of the world they were in, and insisted on getting to Washington at once. But their hosts were sharply insistent that they remain under cover for a while. The mountaineers were so swiftly suspicious of every suggestion of departure that Helyn and her companions were still semi-prisoners in the mountains on the night when Jack Blakeslee had met his heroic death.

BLACKSTONE KENT and Lawrence Larrabee were sitting in their hotel room, disconsolate, when their telephone rang. It was Sir Francis Moxon calling from the hospital. He wanted them to come right up. It was now well after midnight, but they agreed to come. The new operatives, who were guarding their room, had been instructed to let them go wherever they chose, but to accompany them.

So they proceeded to the hospital in two taxicabs, after inspecting the heads of both drivers. Kent and Larry rode in separate cabs, each with a Federal operative.

Sir Francis Moxon met them in the reception room.

Swiftly he informed them, "The man who was caught outside your door, night before last, has been operated on, and has recovered sufficiently to talk. The removal of the moth-grub from his brain has had the same effect on him that it did on your daughter Helyn, namely to restore him to his proper mentality and allegiance, and yet leave unimpaired his memory of all that happened to him while he was a Whoomang. He wants to talk."

"Well, I certainly want him to!" exclaimed Kent.

But when they sought out the house doctor to secure visistors' passes, he demurred.

"That man is too weak, yet," said the physician. "To excite him now, might cause his death."

"I am in charge of this case," snapped Sir Francis, "and that man will talk, if it kills him!"

So the man talked.

First he told about the death-ray machines, and other apparatus, stored in the Rock Creek barn. But his visitors informed him of what had happened at that location.

"Then," said the man, "they will undoubtedly go to their next nearest camp, which is in the mountains just south of Potomac Great Falls."

Blackstone Kent skillfully cross-questioned the man, and became convinced of his absolute sincerity. The man was evidently quite familiar with the Virginia camp. He pointed out its exact location on a map, and described the roads which led to it. Then he

dropped back upon his pillows exhausted, and they left him.

Once more alone except for the two detectives in the reception room of the hospital, the three men held a conference of war.

"It's evident that that plane, which rescued Quivven and Doggo, also carried off the death-ray machines," said Larry. "Moreover, we know from this man's story that there are hundreds of fully armed Whoomangs at the Virginia camp. We can't attack it without troops. And how can we persuade the government to give us troops?"

"I have it!" exclaimed Blackstone Kent. "Colonel Burke!"

"And who is Colonel Burke?" asked Larry.

"Joe Burke is a lieutenant-colonel of Marines, stationed at Quantico, about twenty miles south of here," explained Kent. "He is one of nature's noblemen, and an old, old friend of mine. He can't possibly have been made a Whoomang, for the back of his skull is a silver plate, where he was wounded in the battle of Château Thierry. If he had even been kidnaped by the Whoomangs, the matter-transmitting apparatus would have killed him, for his plate would have been left behind. He'll lend me all the troops I need, and will command them in person."

"But will he?" demurred Sir Francis. "It seems to me that no one but a harebrained youth would embark on an adventure such as ours."

"Ah, but you don't know Colonel Joe," Kent retorted. "He loves nothing better than a good scrap. If he's the same old Joe, he'll be tickled to death to turn out the entire Quantico establishment to fight a private war for a friend."

So the three allies, still accompanied by the two detectives, hired two touring cars, and soon were speeding toward Quantico, as fast as the law allowed.

THE surprised sentinel at the gate called the corporal of the guard, and he roused the sergeant of the guard, and he woke up the officer of the guard. The officer of the guard was sufficiently impressed by Kent's distinguished bearing and Sir Francis's monocle, to take a chance and phone the commandant, without first asking permission of the officer of the day.

The commandant was still "the same old Joe." He directed the officer of the guard to send "my distinguished friend, Blackstone Kent" right up, under proper escort. He received his guests at his quarters in pyjamas and Japanese dressing-gown.

He gave full credence to Kent's fantastic tale. Picking up his telephone, he routed the post adjutant out of bed, and gave orders for an inspection of the whole command under full field equipment in twenty minutes. He ordered the supply officer to unlock the ordnance storehouse and be prepared to issue ammunition, and commanded the transportation officer to get out all the trucks. All officers were directed to report to the quarters of the commandant as soon as they were dressed. A squad of men with a corporal were ordered to come right over on the double quick.

"This is something like!" exulted Kent, rubbing his hands.

"You bet your boots it is!" replied the colonel. "I haven't had such fun since the night we tried to blow up the Cattle Show Building in Concord, or the night we swam ashore in Nica-

ragua. And now, gentlemen, excuse me while I hop upstairs and dress."

The corporal arrived with the squad. Colonel Burke called over the banisters to the corporal to arrest any officer who failed to pass Dr. Moxon's medical examination.

One by one, the officers of the post came smartly in. Sir Francis examined the guard and all passed. He then examined the officers, as they arrived, and ordered the arrest of two of them, without explanation.

A few minutes later, Colonel Burke came down, looking very natty in trench-coat, boots and spurs, campaign hat, and swagger stick. Quickly he checked up on the officers, and ordered the two suspects into solitary confinement, where they were to be allowed to see no one, not even any animals or birds.

At this last remark, they both wilted; but one of them had the courage to demand belligerently, "I have a right to know the charges against me, sir."

"Yes, you have," admitted the colonel, readily enough. "I'll furnish you a copy in the morning. The headquarters stenographer doesn't happen to be up at this time of night."

So that was that.

Then the companies were inspected. No more scars. Good!

"March your companies to the storehouse, for the issue of full war ammunition. Then to the trucks," he commanded.

A few minutes later the entire military personnel of the Quantico Marine Base, with the exception of the officer of the day, the officer of the guard, the guard, the two prisoners, and the air forces, were on the road in trucks and automobiles, bound northwesterly into the Virginia mountains. Quantico is located on the Potomac River, about twenty miles due south of Washington, D. C. The enemy camp was about twenty miles a little north of west from Washington, and thus was about thirty-five miles northwest of Quantico.

Blackstone Kent and Colonel Burke rode in the latter's car at the head of the column. As they rumbled along, they studied a map with the aid of a flash light.

"MY plan of campaign is as follows," announced Colonel Burke. "Instead of driving right down this road"—pointing to one on the map—"which runs to their camp, I shall take this other road, which will bring us about four miles to the south of them. There are mountains in between—see—and the contours are pretty close together, which means steep mountains, but there are ravines indicated here, and it should be possible to scramble up one of those ravines somehow. Thus we can take the enemy by surprise."

Having laid out this general plan, the colonel passed the map to his adjutant—who was sitting in front with the driver—and instructed that officer where to go, and where to unload.

Then he questioned Kent in detail about the probable numbers, disposition and armament of the enemy. Larry, Sir Francis, and the two operatives rode in other cars.

Along toward morning they reached their destination, formed, and started up a gully into the mountains. The gully finally petered out on a plateau, across which they marched due north. Soon thereafter they encountered thick woods and thicker shrubbery.

The sky was overcast, and presently, in spite of their compasses, the officers were all mixed up. Maps were pro-

duced, but the officers were unable to identify their position.

Morning began to dawn, cold and gray, and all around them was nothing but rocks and woods and wilderness.

Then some one announced that he had sighted a house. At once a number of officers went forward and knocked on the door. It was opened by a black-bearded old man, who promptly held both hands aloft above his head.

"Where's yer search warrant?" he demanded. "I know my rights."

"No, no, old-timer," expostulated one of the officers. "Put down your hands. We're not after you. We're merely lost."

A second mountaineer, with a rifle held alertly in both hands, appeared behind the first. And then a girl, and four young men in overalls.

"Helyn!" exclaimed a voice out of the dusk from behind the officers.

"Larry!" she cried, recognizing his voice.

And soon the two were in each other's arms.

With this introduction, friendly relations were soon established. Kent came forward and embraced his long-lost child. She had learned from her four companions that he was still alive and had led the Wisconsin revolt. Kent warmly shook hands with his four lost Wisconsin recruits. There were introductions all around.

Then Colonel Burke explained to the two mountaineers that this expedition was for the purpose of forestalling an expected attempt to assassinate the President. Helyn and her four alleged truckmen now admitted to their hosts that they had been fleeing from the assassins, rather than from "revenooers."

"Well, I'll be durned!" exclaimed one of the mountaineers. "Brother and me was in the Spanish War. We can't let anything like thet go on right in our own front yard, ye mout say. Cain't we enlist?"

"Swear 'em in, judge," said the colonel to Blackstone Kent, wishing to make it impressive.

So Kent had them raise their right hands aloft, and asked them, "Do you solemnly swear to support the Constitution of the United States, and defend it against all its enemies?"

"Yes, sir, I do," they replied, but one of them added, "Leastwise excepting the Eighteenth Amendment."

Kent let it go at that.

THE two mountaineers then got their squirrel-rifles, put on their boots, and led off into the woods. Helyn was left behind, with a squad of Marines to guard her. By now it was almost daylight.

Finally their guides halted them.

"Jest over thet rise ahead, is the camp," they announced.

Colonel Burke asked them some questions, and then deployed his forces. One platoon, he sent with the two guides, to circle the enemy's left flank and strike at the powerhouse, explaining to them the absolute necessity of putting the dynamos out of commission before the death-rays could be turned on the main body.

"When you reach the powerhouse, your lieutenant will fire two shots in quick succession with his forty-five; then wait an instant, and fire one more. That will be our signal to attack."

He dispatched the platoon, then called in his officers, to give them their final battle orders.

After a considerable wait, the signal sounded, "*Crack, crack—crack!*"

With a cheer, the Marines went over the top.

The camp was taken completely by surprise, and it was well that it was, for the attackers were greatly outnumbered. The Whoomangs soon rallied, and their heavy fire forced the Marines to take temporary cover.

An advance picket crept back and reported to Colonel Burke, "Sir, they are wheeling out some funny-looking searchlights behind that building just opposite our center, and are pointing them our way, right through the building."

The colonel looked anxiously at a few electric lights which were still burning in the camp, in spite of the rising sun.

If those lights didn't go out pretty soon, it would mean that the flank attack on the powerhouse had failed. And then would come the searing death-ray.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WAR TO THE DEATH.

THE platoon, guided by the two mountaineers, crept to the powerhouse, the door of which was open. The hum of the generators mingled with the *putt-putt-putt* of the gasoline engine which drove them.

The lieutenant in command fired the three signal shots and gave the order to attack.

But, even as they reached the door, some one slammed it shut. A heavy steel affair it was, bolted securely to the brick walls of the little building. Quickly the soldiers circled the building, but steel shutters were promptly closed on all the windows. Quite evidently the Whoomangs were prepared for just such an emergency.

The lieutenant directed his men to form a pyramid at the first telephone pole. But scarcely had the men got halfway up, when they crumpled to the ground. The pole had been electrified. The Whoomangs were prepared for this, too.

The lieutenant was frantic.

"If we don't cut off the current within the next few minutes," he exclaimed, "our entire force is doomed."

"Would cuttin' them wires do?" inquired one of the mountaineers, pointing aloft.

"Certainly," snapped the lieutenant a bit testily, "but who's going to do it?"

"I aim tew," drawled the Virginian.

Then raising his squirrel rifle, he let fly several times. At each shot one of the wires parted. Soon the powerhouse was completely severed from the rest of the camp.

Fortunately the men who had suffered the electric shock were not badly hurt, merely stunned. The lieutenant formed his platoon, deployed it, and attacked the enemy in the flank. And with them stalked the two black-bearded men, firing steadily, and making every shot tell.

Meanwhile Colonel Burke, anxiously watching the lights of the camp, saw them suddenly flicker out. Of course, this might mean the demolition of the powerhouse, or it might merely mean that some one had noticed the arrival of morning.

If the first explanation were correct, it was safe to attack, and the enemy morale would be sadly shattered by the failure of their greatest weapon. And even if the second explanation were correct, he might just as well attack, for his forces would shortly be annihilated anyway. So he gave the order to charge.

The Whoomangs were caught between the cross-fire of Burke's forces and the platoon which had been sent to attack the powerhouse. They had depended on the death-ray machines, and those diabolical implements had failed them. After a brief stand they ran.

But even as they did so, an airplane rose from the midst of their camp and soared away, amid a vain fusillade of shots from the victors.

And then a flight of pigeons rose from the administration building.

"Shoot those birds!" shouted Kent excitedly.

"Yer really want 'em?" asked one of the mountaineers dubiously.

"For God's sake, yes!" exclaimed Kent.

"Come on, brother," remarked the other casually, and raising their rifles, they brought down every bird.

Colonel Burke took over the camp. Once more in the history of the Marine Corps, the Marines had arrived and had the situation well in hand. Every animal which the victors found was promptly slaughtered, despite the human expression in their eyes.

The beleaguered powerhouse surrendered. Every building was searched.

The four men who had been captured in the taxicab were found and released. The Whoomangs were herded into barracks and placed under guard. Not even the doctors and nurses were spared, for the conventions of war did not apply to such a conflict as this. Patrols were dispatched into the surrounding woods to round up stragglers.

BUT it soon became evident that Quivven and Doggo had escaped again. Another Pyrrhic victory for Kent! And "The Day" was to be to-morrow! Kent had only that day and night in which to forestall the *coup d'état*.

Well, at least he had the satisfaction of realizing that he was being somewhat annoying to the enemy. He had broken up three of their establishments, he and Larry were still alive and free, and his daughter Helyn was safe once more.

Breakfast was found half completed, was taken over by Marine Corps K.P's., and was served to the victors in the Whoomang mess-hall.

It was then decided that Kent and Larry and Sir Francis and the detectives should return at once to Washington, and Colonel Burke to Quantico. Helyn would be safer in the mountain cabin of the moonshiners, until "The Day" had come and gone. Much as Larry longed to be with her, he realized where his duty lay.

So they helped themselves to several of the fine cars parked around the administration building, and set out, leaving one of Burke's majors in command of the captured camp.

Before they reached the point where the roads to Washington and Quantico forked, a Marine private on a motorcycle met them, and held up his hand for them to stop. To Colonel Burke he handed a dispatch.

The colonel read it, and then his face suffused with smiles. He strode over to Kent's car.

"Listen to this. The officer of the day at Quantico reports that one of our aviators has just phoned in that he attacked and brought down an enemy plane, and has captured a big black bug and a furry lady all covered with fur—can you feature that?—'a furry lady all covered with fur.' That's just what it says here, 'a furry—'"

"Yes, yes, go on!" interrupted Kent.

"And one wounded man and one dead man," continued Burke lamely. "Well, anyhow, this dispatch gives us the map position. Come on, let's go there."

He mentioned two numbers on the artillery grid system which were absolutely unintelligible to his civilian auditors, but which apparently constituted quite explicit directions to the Marine privates who were driving the cars; and soon they were all dashing down another road.

It was not long before they pulled up at a field in which lay three airplanes, two of which were neatly parked, and the third rather badly smashed up. The huge black antman and Quivven the Goldenflame stood facing two Marine enlisted men and one Marine officer. Beside them on the ground lay two motionless human forms, one of which was tenderly wrapped in blankets. Another Marine officer advanced and saluted as Colonel Burke and his friends approached.

"Sir," reported the young flyer, "we took off at daybreak, just as you ordered, and flew toward the spot where you told us the enemy camp was located. We heard the sounds of fighting, and then saw a plane come up, so we tried to head it off. It cut loose at us with a machine gun, sir, so we fired back, and it crashed. The driver's done for, sir; we shot him up pretty badly. But the bug and the yellow lady don't seem hurt at all. The other fellow seems to have been wounded before. He was wrapped up in blankets when we found him."

As they approached the group, Quivven's lip curled with scorn.

"So it's you, Sergeant Stone?" said she. "The traitor who led the new men against his own Whoomangs up at the Wisconsin camp?"

"No, madam," replied Kent, with a smile. "It's Blackstone Kent, whose nephew and daughter you kidnaped, who was drowned at sea, and who has been on your trail all summer."

"Your nephew is over there," announced Quivven, dramatically indicating the still figure swathed in blankets.

Kent and Sir Francis hastened to Eliot's side.

"He's in a bad way," reported the doctor, after a hurried examination. "We must get him to a hospital at once."

"We have a fine hospital at Quantico," suggested Colonel Burke.

"Then let's get him there right away," asserted Kent, "and the golden lady, too."

So Eliot Endicott was carried, and Quivven the Goldenflame was led to the waiting cars.

"LET'S bump off the big ant," suggested the colonel. "He's only an insect."

"No, no!" Kent demurred. "We may need him yet."

"Thank you," replied Quivven sweetly. "We have influential friends in Washington. Before to-morrow night the President will be ordering our release."

"I rather think not," asserted Kent grimly.

"You do, do you?" countered Quivven. "Well, I might just as well be frank with you. Your capturing Doggo and me won't in the least interfere with the plans of our organization. So treat us carefully, if you value your lives. We can be grateful, if you act so as to deserve gratitude."

"Her confidence rather gives one a chill," remarked Larry aside to Sir Francis Moxon.

So Eliot Endicott and Quivven were rushed to Quantico. The huge ant was left in the field, under guard, until an army truck could be sent after him.

Larry also went to Quantico, but Kent hurried to Washington to report to the Attorney-General. That official refused to believe the latest news until he had phoned to the Marine base and had talked personally to the commandant.

Then he warmly shook Kent's hand and said, "Tell me anything whatever from now on, and I'll believe you. But what are we to do now? Undoubtedly all the enemy plans have already been made for to-morrow, and will not need the guiding hands of those two creatures."

"We must examine the heads of all the Cabinet," asserted Kent, "and arrest the two Whoomang members."

But the Attorney-General refused. Even with the downfall of the government staring him in the face, he could not bring himself to risk offending the rest of the Cabinet.

"It can't be the Secretary of the Navy," he began, "for if it were, Colonel Burke would have been reprimanded by now. It can't be—"

Kent interrupted. "If you won't take the obvious course, there's no use to sit around and guess who's who. Put extra guards on the President and Cabinet, then, and let it go at that. I've done all that I can. I've been practically without sleep for several days and nights. I'm not as young as I used to be, and so I'm going back to my hotel and turn in. Let me have an extra guard, too, if you please."

"You aren't going to give up and desert us, are you?" exclaimed the Attorney-General. "Can't you at least suggest something for us to do?"

"I made my suggestion, and you rejected it," replied Kent coldly.

"But suggest something else."

"All right," said Kent. "Notify the District police that you must locate two important criminals to-day or to-night, a man and a woman, and that their only identifying feature is that each of them has a scar at the base of the skull. You might even tell the Police Commissioner that unless the man and the woman are arrested before daybreak to-morrow, the President's life will be in grave danger.

"Tell the Commissioner that the man may even be a member of the force, so that he must first look over the entire force for scars. Use whatever influence or cajolery you can, and get him to put every patrolman, traffic cop, and detective to work to run these two alleged individuals down for you, and to arrest as a suspicious character every person having such a scar. This ought to result in rounding up a considerable number of the enemy, and may so hamper their plans, by removing a few key individuals, that they will be forced to postpone 'The Day,' and give us a chance to combat them."

"A good idea!" exclaimed the Attorney-General. "I hate inaction."

"Then stir up enough action for the two of us. I've got to rest," asserted Kent. "Remember the extra guard, please. And phone me, if anything interesting develops."

Then, although it was only just about noon, Blackstone Kent went to bed and was soon fast asleep.

THE police dragnet rounded up quite a few persons with scars, but it was not possible to ascertain whether they were Whoomangs, or if so, just how important they were to the plans for the morrow.

About midnight Kent was awakened by the insistent ringing of his telephone. The call purported to be from Sir Francis Moxon at the Marine hospital, urging Kent to come immediately to Quantico. Sir Francis wouldn't tell him what for. So Kent agreed, and started to dress.

Then it occurred to him that this might be a trap, so he called the Marine Base and asked for the commandant, by whom he verified the call.

So Kent hired three touring cars, examined the drivers for scars, and started for Quantico, taking two detectives with him in one car, and preceded and followed by cars each containing one detective. As the fatal Day drew near he was becoming more and more cautious.

As he left the hotel he glanced at his watch. Just 12.01 A.M. The fatal Day had arrived.

He reached Quantico about one in the morning. The sentry at the gate was expecting him, and let him right in. Soon he was in conference with Larry and Colonel Burke and Sir Francis. The object of sending for him was this: Quivven had rallied from her operation with unexpected rapidity, but refused to talk.

So Blackstone Kent went to see her. Gone were all her ambitions and dreams of empire, for she was no longer a Whoomang. And yet she refused to give them any assistance in preventing the carrying out of the Whoomang plans.

"What's it to me?" she persisted dully. "I am not of your Earth. Your affairs do not concern me. I am a Vairking of the planet Venus. Let me go back to my own planet and rest after this terrible experience."

In vain Kent argued and threatened and cajoled. Here was the key to the whole situation, but the key refused to turn in the lock.

And then Kent thought of the golden princess's love for Eliot Endicott. He withdrew and conferred with Sir Francis. Eliot was reported as being very low, but conscious. Kent conferred with his nephew, and then had the young man's bed wheeled in beside that of Quivven.

For a few moments the two of them gazed hungrily at each other, and then Eliot held out his hand feebly, and Quivven took it. Her eyes were wet with tears; she was visibly affected.

"Is it true, Quivven dearest," he asked, "that you are no longer a Whoomang, and that you are no longer determined to rule the world?"

"It is true, Eliot," said she.

"And you still love me?"

"I do, forever."

"Quivven, Goldenflame," said he, "I followed you, and you alone. I fought for you personally, not for the Whoomang cause. It was for you that I betrayed my country. And now that you no longer care one way or the other, won't you help these men to save America?"

"You love your country?"

"Second only to you, Quivven."

"And it would give you pleasure for me to save your country?"

"It would go a long way toward enabling me to hold up my head again, and face the world, Quivven."

"For you, Eliot, I will do it." Then turning to Kent, she asked, "Well, what is it that you wish me to do for you?"

Eliot Endicott slumped back, exhausted. He had partially atoned for his faithlessness to his official oath.

Quickly Kent and Quivven discussed details. An extension telephone was strung in to the bed of the Princess.

And then she called a certain Washington number.

"HELLO! . . . Fairfield? . . . Oh, this is you, is it? This is her majesty speaking. Get me Fairfield at once . . . Yes, it's important. Am I accustomed to give orders which are not important? . . . It will take between a half or three-quarters of an hour, you say? Very well, then, have Fairfield call me at Alexandria 168, just as soon as you can get hold of him . . . Good-by."

"But—but—" Colonel Burke sputtered, "Alexandria 168 isn't our number."

"Isn't it?" replied Quivven archly. "Then it had better become so, quite quickly, if you would save your beloved America. Wouldn't I have been a fool if I had given my man the correct number of the Marine Base? He has brains enough to make inquiries before he calls back."

"I take off my hat to your majesty," said Kent; then, snatching up the phone, "Alexandria chief operator, please... Hello! Chief operator? This is Operative Kent of the Department of Justice, calling from Quantico Marine Base . . . You'll have to take my word for it; I can't show you my badge over the phone very well, can I? . . . Tell me, have you a number 168? . . . Good! If any one calls that number in the next hour, connect them with the Marine Base, without explanation."

A long pause while the telephone official replied, then Kent hung up the receiver and said in a disgusted tone, "He refuses to do it. Come on, Burke, you've got to drive me, like the devil, over to Alexandria, and identify me to that pup!"

So they left Quivven and Eliot lying hand in hand, and hastened out into the night. It was now about two o'clock in the morning of the Day set for the great Whoomang revolution.

Before leaving the Marine Base they had the Post operator plug line No. 4 permanently to Quivven's phone.

At Alexandria they experienced but little difficulty in persuading the telephone company official that they were genuine—luckily, being sufficiently impressed with the colonel's uniform, he didn't ask to see Kent's non-existent badge.

The official agreed to put through, to the fourth line of the Marine Base, any call for 168, and to tell any inquirer that that number represented a lonely house in the suburbs of the city. Kent was permitted to examine the heads of all the operators, on the pretense that he was looking for an escaped female prisoner with a peculiar birthmark under her hair.

Just as Kent and Burke were about to leave, one of the girls smiled and nodded to the chief operator.

"Here's your party now," said he. "Would you like to listen in?"

They eagerly assented, and were furnished earphones, and were plugged into the line. They heard Fairfield, whoever he was, call Quivven, and guardedly identify himself and her.

Then she asked, "You learned of the capture of our camp at Potomac Great Falls, and of my subsequent escape?"

Yes, he had learned that she and Doggo had made a safe get-away in a plane. The organization had been waiting for word of the two of them ever since.

"Well," said Quivven, "we are safe and in hiding on the outskirts of Alexandria. Important changes will have to be made in to-day's plans."

"I hope they are not to be called off!" murmured Fairfield.

"Your enthusiasm does you credit," replied the Princess. "Not called off, but merely materially altered in order to make the result more certain, in view of recent events. So I want you to get in touch with every man, woman, and animal who has a part assigned in to-day's great events. Tell them all to gather at Station G, just before sunrise. Tell them to leave their autos at quite a distance, and walk, so as to attract no attention.

"No lights at the station. Keep well under cover within the building, and expect me by airplane just at sunrise. And now go away from your phone, but leave one man there who can get in touch with you. I shall leave this phone; for we may have been overheard, and detectives may even now be hastening to the houses of our two numbers."

"Every detail shall be carried out to the letter, your majesty."

Quivven and her minion both hung up.

BLACKSTONE KENT pointed out to Colonel Burke, "Now, all that we have to do is to find Station G, and surround it. We'll need troops for that."

So the colonel called the recently captured camp near Great Falls, and ordered the major, whom he had left in charge, to entrain at once for Washington, with all the men he could spare, and to expect further orders *en route*.

Then thanking the chief operator, they hurried back to Quantico, reaching there about half past three in the morning.

Quivven the Goldenflame was asleep, her hand still clasping that of Eliot Endicott. Quickly they roused her, and inquired the location of Station G. It turned out to be the same Rock Creek barn where Jack Blakeslee had demolished the matter-transmitting apparatus, and had received his death wound.

Then Quivven said, "Eliot, dear, your hand is cold from holding it out to my bed like this. Better tuck it in for a little while."

She released it, and it slumped to the floor.

"He's dead!" she shrieked.

Sir Francis Moxon came running. Sure enough, Eliot Endicott was dead. He had made his final atonement.

"Oh, you Americans!" screamed Quivven. "You killed my Eliot! Your bullets did it! Oh, how I hate you! But I'll undo what I have just done to help you! It is not yet too late."

And she seized the telephone.

But Kent and the colonel wrenched it from her hands.

Meanwhile Sir Francis had been quickly rummaging in his medicine-case. Striding over to Quivven's bed, he suddenly jabbed a hypodermic needle into her side.

"Tell them to keep away from Station G!" she shouted. "Let the Great Day be carried out exactly as planned."

She sank back on the pillows and turned triumphant though fast-dulling eyes at the men who surrounded her. "I am sleepy," said she. "I have been drugged. But I got my message off in time. Even now it is on its way to Fairfield. My Eliot will be avenged."

Meanwhile a large gray cat sneaked out from under Quivven's bed and slunk down the aisle between the cots of the hospital.

But Kent went always armed, these days. Drawing his revolver, he brought down the sneaking Whoomang

messenger cat. His ability as a pistol shot, which had won him his sergeantcy among the Whoomangs, once more stood him in good stead.

He could not tell, however, whether any other Whoomang animals had heard the last frantic words of the drugged golden princess and were already on the way with the message.

HAD Quivven planned to double cross them, anyway? It looked like it now, for how else could one explain the presence of the cat under her bed, and known to her? Its presence must have been known to her, or she would not have been so confident of the delivery of her message. But they could only speculate on this, for the cat was dead; and Quivven was by now in a deeply drugged slumber.

Another cat stuck its head in the door of the hospital ward. Quickly Kent drew, and fired again. But, as he did so, Colonel Burke knocked up his hand. The bullet went wide, and the cat stealthily vanished.

Kent turned furiously upon his friend.

"Damn it, man," he rasped, "why did you do that?"

"You have animals on the brain," replied Burke soothingly. "That was our regimental mascot. We can't have you killing her, you know."

"Prove it!" snapped Kent.

So Burke went and got Tabby and brought her in. She had no scars. Kent sheepishly joined in the general mirth.

Then the colonel wrote out orders, which he sent by motorcycle to the Marine troops who were on their way to Washington. Also he instructed his two planes to set out for the Rock Creek barn just before sunrise.

Meanwhile Kent got the Attorney-General on the phone—that official was anxiously spending the night at the Department of Justice—and asked him to locate the house of the telephone number which Quivven had called, arrest the scarred man whom he would find there, and try and ascertain from him the whereabouts of a man named Fairfield.

Kent was fearful lest Quivven's recall message might have got out, or that Quivven might have lied to them as to the location of Station G, and he meant to do everything possible to forestall the enemy.

Then he went to take a look at the warehouse where they had Doggo chained and guarded. The huge antman was still there, all right, and the lawyer could not resist the temptation of taunting him.

"The great Day has come, Doggo," said he.

"'But not yet gone, Cæsar,'" the antman quoted back at him. "You see, I know some of the literature of you humans."

This gave Kent an idea. Doggo must be removed as a menace. There must be no Whoomang ant for the new President to release, if the coup should still succeed. So Kent sought out Sir Francis.

"But I'm no veterinary," objected the doctor.

"Nevertheless, it must be done," asserted Kent; so the doctor agreed.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MOPPING UP.

LEAVING Larry to watch the sleeping Quivven, Kent and Burke, with half the operatives, motored as rapidly as possible to Washington. The colonel, to take charge of his

troops; and the lawyer, to inform the Attorney-General of developments.

That official at once requisitioned the riot squad of the city police and had it held in readiness under the Sixteenth Street viaduct. Then he sent several of his best operatives to spy on the supposedly vacant barn. These made contact with the advance pickets of the main body of the Marines, which was deployed in the bed of Rock Creek in the vicinity of the swimming hole.

All reported that no men had been observed approaching the old barn. It was now nearly dawn of the great Day. The sun rose over the eastern Maryland hills. The old barn stood out bleak and bare on the hillside. From the southward came the drone of an airplane. A motorcycle cop, driving slowly down Sixteenth Street from the north, stopped at a point from which the building was not concealed by the trees. From the valley of Rock Creek a long skirmish-line of Marines crept stealthily upward toward the old barn.

The airplane landed in a vacant field beside the barn and taxied up almost to the door. Still no signs of life. One of the aviators got out and approached the door with drawn revolver, while the other aimed the machine gun of the craft squarely at the building.

The man who was on foot flung open the door, then stepped back a pace. Within the barn the early morning sun disclosed a throng of men, women, and animals. They had all arrived there long before the Marine scouts and the Department of Justice detectives; for Quivven had urged them, through Fairfield, to keep under cover, and they had been most successful in so doing. For a moment they stood surprised, irresolute. Then some one within fired a shot at the aviator, and several made a rush for the door.

But just at that instant the machine gun cut loose, not at the throng inside, but around it, as a warning, and the Whoomang hordes slunk back into the darkness of the interior.

The waiting motorcycle cop on Sixteenth Street sped full speed to the southward, with his siren going full blast.

Out from one the cellar doors of the barn, on the side away from the aviators, poured the Whoomang forces, only to be driven back again by the charging Marines.

Then, with the roar of many motors, there arrived the riot squad of the District police. The Marines surrounded the building, and let the riot squad go in and do the mopping up. There was surprisingly little resistance inside, for the spirit of the enemy was broken without their leaders.

A few pigeons rose from the cupola of the barn, but the second Marine aircraft, just then arriving, circled after them and shot them down, one by one, with machine gun fire. The victory was complete.

Blackstone Kent, and the Attorney-General, and Colonel Burke solemnly shook hands, as the sun rose and shone full upon the nation they had saved.

Then the police sergeant in charge called for the patrol wagons, and Kent phoned the glad news to Sir Francis Moxon and Lawrence Larrabee, anxiously awaiting at Quantico.

"You're in charge, Sir Francis!" shouted Larry, and seizing the first car he could lay his hands on, sped off to the mountain cabin and Helyn.

THERE is not much more to tell. Of course, the President was informed of the whole story. The two Whoomang members of the Cabinet were identified, were quietly seized

by Secret Service men, and were restored to normal by the surgical skill of Sir Francis Moxon, to their deep gratitude.

Blackstone Kent brought his legal ability into play by organizing a chain of corporations to take over all the property which had been amassed by the criminal organization. These corporations were administered by him for the benefit of the ex-Whoomangs, who had formerly been employed on the various undertakings of the triumvirate.

Deprived of their leaders, most of the Whoomangs appeared to become stricken with a sort of numbing fear, and hence merely waited dumbly in their various camps for the arrival of Kent and his conquering forces, who had Sir Francis Moxon and Dr. Victor Chapin superintend the work of restoring them to a human state.

Many of the more brainy of the Whoomangs resisted, but against them Kent always employed the following tactics, with almost invariable success. The objector would be seized, legally or otherwise, and would be promptly operated on. The operation would restore him to normal, and that would be the end of his armed or legal opposition.

Among the electrical experts of the Whoomang organization were found men capable of recreating the superpowerful matter-transmitting set, with which the gray dragon and the huge antman and the golden Princess had been brought down from the Planet Venus by Aaron Cohen. Neither of the survivors of this triumvirate cared to remain on earth, nor did they, restored to normal, wish to be sent back to the land of the Whoomangs on Venus.

So Kent's electrical experts finally got in touch with Myles Standish Cabot, the Radio Man, formerly of Boston, but now regent of the Kingdom of Cupia on Venus. At Quivven's request, nothing was said about her, but Cabot was notified that his old friend Doggo wished to come back to him.

When all was ready, Quivven, too, stepped within the coördinate axes, the proper formula was repeated, the switches were closed, and Doggo the Formian and Quivven the Goldenflame passed from the ken of mankind.

Lawrence Larrabee married Helyn Kent in Washington, D. C., at a wedding which was one of the leading events of the social season, and which was attended by the President and Cabinet, the British ambassador, and the entire Marine establishment from Quantico. He is fast becoming Kent's right-hand man.

Dr. Victor Chapin married pretty little blue-eyed Alice, who insisted on it as soon as her operation made her human once more. And on a visit to Larry, he confided, with a touch of retrospective sadness in his voice, "You know, Alice was much more docile when she was a Whoomang."

THE END.

The Men Who Make The Argosy

JOHN H. THOMPSON

Author of "Epicures," "A Dabble in Dogs," "The Clutch of Circumstance," etc.

QUITE a contract—this business of having one write five hundred words about one's self. It's a pretty heavy wordage to pile on a presumably modest man. If he pads it out with garlands of verbal roses, everybody says: "The poor boob sure has got a crush on himself." On the other hand, if he gives only a few bare details and lets it go at that, everybody says: "He's making it brief so there'll be room for a bigger picture."

But there's got to be something done about it, so here goes.

I was born June 6, 1890, in Brooklyn, New York, and attended grammar and high school in that city. While in high school I served as editor-in-chief of the school magazine. I wrote sporting stuff for the Brooklyn *Daily Eagle* for a while and covered special assignments for the old New York *Herald;* but since 1909 have been on the staff of the Torrington *Register*, an evening paper published at Torrington, Connecticut. I started as a reporter, worked like blazes and now stagger under the heavy titular burden of Managing Editor.

I began writing stories several years ago and out of some hundred that have been published, forty-three have appeared in the Argosy. Most of the stories deal with the adventures and misadventures of "Bill and I." Twenty years in newspaper work in a small city, I have found, provides one with plenty of material to write about.

I am married, have two children, a dog and a car, so it will be easy for the average reader to understand why I took to writing short stories in my spare time.

My greatest inspirations are my wife, my mother and my children, who have the happy habit of kidding me into believing that another milestone on the road to human achievement has been unveiled each time one of my stories is published. Another inspiration is the kind-hearted reader who occasionally sends in a letter to "Argonotes" saying that my stories have given him or her pleasure. And still another source of inspiration—and perhaps this rightly ought to go first—is the check that arrives each time a story clicks.

My favorite pastime is motoring; my favorite poet, Kipling; my favorite work, writing. I might add that I am probation officer of the Torrington city and juvenile courts.

I guess that's about all; and though there's still about a hundred words to go, there isn't a harrowing detail left, so I'll have to quit.

Argonotes.

The Readers' Viewpoint

INDIA

AT this time of unrest in India Theodore Roscoe's story, "The Ruby of Suratan Singh," is doubly interesting—as is his account of the realistic background from which it sprang:

"The Ruby of Suratan Singh" is partly based on a fact-story that pales fiction and should make the reader with a yen for treasure hunting prick up his ears. Recent press notices of trouble in India call to mind the Sepoy Rebellion—the terrible Indian mutiny of 1857. Few present-day Americans know anything at all about that savage war which flamed across India some seventy-odd years ago. But the Sepoy Rebellion was brought vividly home to me by my grandparents, who reached India four years after its close, while the blood was still drying in the paddy fields.

Early in the year of '57 the Sepoy (Hindu and Mohammedan colonial soldiery) revolted; the entire Bengal army mutinied, and the valley of the Ganges rose against the established British rule. The natives gained control of the garrisons. The scattered white communities were torn to pieces. The plan was to drive out all Europeans and place dethroned nabobs once more in the seat of power.

Political unrest lay behind the uprising, but the main cause seemed to lie in a rumor that the cartridges served the native regiments had been greased with cow-fat and pig-lard. These animals are unclean to Mohammedan and Hindu alike. The enraged native soldiers considered themselves religiously defiled, their souls lost. The war burst as a protest, for no man takes his religious dogma more seriously than the Oriental; and soon India was drenched with blood. An outstanding incident of the mutiny was the Cawnpore massacre—a hideous hecatomb devised by a native prince known as the Nana Sahib. Against the wishes of his own people and his household troops, the savage Nana ordered two hundred helpless prisoners of war—nearly all European women—cut down in cold blood, and hired low-caste butchermen to do the job when the Sepoys refused it.

The Nana Sahib's infamy blackened the name of his entire race at that time; but it occurred to me, in writing my story, that it was unfair to splatter the backs of an entire people with the poisonous treachery of one half-mad despot. The Nana's court had voted against the slaughter and his Sepoys had risked their heads in refusing to carry out his order. And many of those native soldiers fought for a cause they believed right, even as the troopers of the mistaken Confederacy of America.

But the troopers of General Havelock were wild to avenge the Nana's fiendish deed, and soon the Nana's Sepoys were defeated in battle after battle. The point of the tale is that Nana Sahib wore in his turban a celebrated ruby, an enormous gem of uncounted value, which he believed an amulet endowed with the power to make his life a charmed one. When the victorious British shattered the Nana's army, the prince raced for the hills, always wearing his priceless ruby. The British pushed him hard, and he fled into the *terai* jungles near Bareilly (my parents, incidentally, lived there for some years) and on into wild Himalayan foothills. It was a grim race. The Nana got deeper and deeper into a land deadly with fever, an almost impassable wilderness. The white troops pursuing him were unable to follow his trail. Eventually the Nana's few companions dropped along the path, and the prince went on alone, wearing in his turban a ruby that was famous from Nepal to Baluchistan.

Havelock's men were unable to catch the prince. Nana and his ruby were swallowed up in the Himalayas. The mutiny succumbed to British bayonets and diplomacy. India recovered and went about her business. A shrine stands at Cawnpore to commemorate the massacre. But the great ruby of Nana Sahib was not to be forgotten, either. My grandfather told me about it in his own words. It must have been an invaluable gem. It must still be there in those jungle-infested hills, waiting to be found. Perhaps this quotation from Butler's "The Land of the Veda" will make authentic a story that sounds like a fabled "Arabian Night":

"It was probably in his turban when he wandered up that deep ravine to die alone; and if so, there it lies to-day, for no human hand will ever penetrate those pestilential jungles to gather it. The eagles of the Himalayas

alone, as they look down from their lofty height for their prey, are the only creatures that will ever see the burning rays of that ruby as it shines amid the rags of the vagrant who perished there long years ago."

It was this story of a mad nabob's flight for escape and a wish to play fair for the others that suggested to me my story.

THEODORE ROSCOE.

A NEWCOMER

GEORGE TIBBITTS, author of "Death's Outpost," makes his initial appearance in ARGOSY in this issue and says of himself:

I am thirty-five. Born in Brooklyn, French and English parentage. Went to the war. Have knocked about the world a good deal since. Adventure in strange places intrigues me. I frequently meet travelers who have been in strange and curious corners of the world, from whom I obtain material for yarns. The plot for "Death's Outpost" was given to me by a traveler who claimed to have personal knowledge of such an incident. The character *Far Loo*, the Chinaman who speaks French, is a man I know personally—only he is a scholar and not a servant.

GEORGE TIBBITTS.

COON MOUNTAIN BILL

AWHILE ago we published the photograph and biographical sketch of Coon Mountain Bill (William Merriam Rouse). Thinking that he might appreciate the original drawing from which the photograph was made, we sent it to him. But Bill hardly seems to be an appreciative soul. Says he:

DERE EDDITUR:

i am much oblidged i know You meant well. I tryed keepn the pitcher In the house last nite but my nerves aint wat they was sense i begun to drink Kerosene oil and tobacker juice account of the licker bein so poor here. i had the jimmies. i got up in the middle of the nite and went over to Zeke Stoneboats place to give him the pitcher and get some sider. He put the pitcher in the cornfield account of the crows bothern. they was thirty fore ded crows this morning but a heffer calf got into the corn durin the nite and she was ded to The vetnary said it was heart diseese we cant keep the pitcher no place account of trouble Ellery Potts see it when he was soberin up today and they have got him tyed to a corner of the hoss barn with a log chain. i lik pitchers i read the Tonnerville troly but this is not so funny as them. i will let you no if it is fatal with Ellery lik the heffer. i guess I will give it to Doolittle Pratt he is so mean he puts a lantern in the stove in the winter time to mak himself think hes got a fire yourtrly as ever.

COON MOUNTAIN BILL.

LOOKING AHEAD!

THESE seafaring men are particular fellows. Soon after we printed the first sailor in the Looking Ahead announcement one of them pointed out that we were all wrong. So we got a fine new illustration—only to be checked up as follows:

Pascagoula, Miss.

Kindly excuse me if you think that I am butting in. Just wanted to say that I am an old seafaring man, and noticed your Looking Ahead picture, which is drawn by a good artist, has the man looking athwartship instead of ahead. The officer is looking off broadside of ship.

H. H. PURDY.

So again we have revised this troublesome mariner and are hoping that this time he is all shipshape.

JUST as this item goes to the press we have had a telephone call from A. Merritt announcing the completion of the sequel to "The Face in the Abyss." It won't be long now!

Skellytown, Texas.

This old reader of ARGOSY feels moved to the point of exercising the Hunt and Peck system on the old typewriter to let you know what joy you caused in the camp by the announcement of a continuation of the story, "The Face in the Abyss," by A. Merritt. I began reading the ARGOSY about twenty years ago and during the last fifteen years there have been very few issues that failed to find the way into the house.

Personally, I don't care much for your Western stories, but I don't consider that sufficient reason to condemn you for publishing them. I liked "The Planet of Peril," "The Phantom in the Rainbow," "A Great Man's

Shoes" and "The Princess of the Atom." In fact, I read almost everything you publish, but the above named are outstanding. The best story I ever read in ARGOSY was "The Face in the Abyss," and I look forward with pleasure to Merritt's return.

Please don't discontinue those little footnotes; we find them very interesting.

George F. Worts used to be "punk," but he is improving. All that I can see he needs is for W. C. Tuttle to teach him poker and remove the hazards of too many aces in the deck. I've been uneasy about him at times.

Every change I have noted in ARGOSY has been for the best and I have begun to believe that the editors know their business, and so long as it continues at its present standard you will find me carrying one home every week.

W. R. WHITE.

J. E. GRINSTEAD made plenty of friends with his last serial, "In the Reign of King Ben." Among the letters he received personally was this one:

Chicago, Ill.

Just a few words to thank you for *Cleve Gault, Gus Kottner* and *Old Norton,* in "The Reign of King Ben." It sure was one wonderful story. No automobiles, airplanes or Volstead to spoil it.

When will there be another story?

FRED SWENSEN.

Mr. Grinstead's next serial, "The Crimson Trail," starts in our August 23 issue.

JOHN SOLOMON brought this old reader back to ARGOSY:

Windsor, Ont.

I have had so much pleasure in reading "The Mysterious John Solomon," by H. Bedford-Jones that I cannot refrain from writing to thank you for it.

I have for many years read much of this author's works, but during the past two years have given much of my time to other things than reading fiction, and had got out of the way of buying magazines of the type of ARGOSY. Years ago I was a constant reader of this magazine, but dropped it from my list, with others, because of new interests.

Through reading the adventures of *John Solomon* my interest in reading has again been awakened and I am awaiting with impatience further adventures of this wonderful character.

If H. Bedford-Jones is to continue giving the reader the adventures of *John Solomon* you can count on me becoming a "constant reader" of ARGOSY.

A. E. EDGAR.

NOW for a few likes and dislikes:

Oakland, Cal.

Have been reading the ARGOSY since the good old days, when it was monthly, and contained book-length novels. Do you remember Fred Jackson, and what a favorite he was? I read a serial by him recently, in a newspaper, so guess he is still on the job.

In the present magazine I am enjoying "Gone North" and "Island of the Damned" especially.

Like serials of the West, South Seas, mystery and fantastic. Dislike historical stories like "He Rules Who Can," "Drums of Peace" and "Alexander the Red."

My favorite authors are Ray Cummings, O. A. Kline, Seltzer, MacIsaac, Kenneth Perkins and J. Allan Dunn, also many others.

Like the short stories by William M. Rouse, and glad to see Harwood Steele added to your list.

Variety is what I like most about the ARGOSY. I get tired of the magazines which publish the same type of story.

Would like to see a serial with Devil's Island as the setting.

Best wishes from a satisfied reader.

ALLEN M. RAY.

HERE is another angle of the impossible story discussion:

Jackson, Miss.

Although I rank among the old-timers, having started with the *Golden Argosy,* this is my first blurb, and this is written merely to get in the discussion about impossible stories. As long as these stories are taken for what they are—impossible—I haven't a word to say, but the frequent attempts to justify them by comparison with Jules Verne's output get under my skin.

Verne wrote about what he saw accomplished by some form of life, and merely equipped his human characters with facilities for competing with the birds and fishes in their own media. Now when you show me some form of life as we know it blithely skipping from planet to satellite in reckless gay abandon, then I'll acknowledge there is some analogy between these authors and Verne.

My favorites are all of them sometimes and none of them sometimes, as I realize that

authors are human and cannot be at their best in every story. *Gillian Hazeltine* is always interesting, and Fred MacIsaac is uniformly good. "Hawk of Hazard" and "Master of Airlie" were exceptionally strong stories. In conclusion I wish to state that the mood of the reader has much to do with his appreciation of a story.

I. C. VANASDAL.

KINGSBURY SCOTT'S Great Lakes stories find many enthusiasts:

Milwaukee, Wis.

I liked the short story, "The Old Master," by Kingsbury Scott, because of its fascinating interest from beginning to end; because its every detail was not fictitious; its chief character has lived and lives to-day. Because I know Lake Michigan I was able to judge the story on substance merit, and in its reading found it not wanting in truth. Because it contained in right proportion the seven essential characteristics of a good short story for this type of magazine: a single predominating incident, a single preëminent character, imagination, plot, compression, organization, unity of impression.

GUSTAVE COOKE.

YOUR CHOICE COUPON

Editor, ARGOSY,
280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:

1.....

2.....

3.....

4.....

5.....

Name.....

Street.....

City..... *State*.....

7-12

Looking Ahead!

The Czarina's Pearls

Russia under the sinister and evil domination of the monk Rasputin! A tale of thrilling adventure in a setting of constant deadly peril—such is this new two-part story

BY MALCOLM WHEELER-NICHOLSON

A Year in a Day

One of the most interesting fantastic novelettes we have published. Fascinating you will find this tale of life speeded up hundreds of times above normal. One of the best stories from the pen of

ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

COMING TO YOU IN THE ARGOSY OF JULY 19th

10th Anniversary TIRE SALE

FREE TUBE KIT WITH EACH TIRE ORDER

GOODRICH—GOODYEAR—FIRESTONE—U.S.—Other Makes

Special low prices on all standard brand, guaranteed, reconstructed tires and new tubes to celebrate 10th anniversary of serving thousands to dependable low cost tire mileage. Every tire sold on **Lifetime** Guarantee.

LOWEST PRICES IN HISTORY!

SIZE	TIRE	TUBE	SIZE	TIRE	TUBE
			BALLOONS		
30x3	$2.25	$ .80	28x4.75	$2.40	$1.10
30x3½	2.25	.95	29x4.40	2.30	1.00
31x4	2.95	1.10	29x4.50	2.40	1.10
32x4	2.95	1.10	29x4.75	2.45	1.10
33x4	2.95	1.10	29x5.00	2.75	1.10
34x4	2.95	1.00	10x4.50	2.45	1.10
32x4½	3.25	1.25	30x4.95	2.90	1.25
33x4½	3.25	1.25	30x5.25	2.95	1.25
34x4½	3.25	1.25	31x5.25	3.15	1.35
30x5	3.55	1.25	32x6.00	3.20	1.35
33x5	3.55	1.25	33x6.00	3.25	1.35
35x5	3.65	1.25			

UNLIMITED SERVICE GUARANTEE

GUARANTEE PROTECTS YOU *Write for prices on other sizes* We will replace at half price any tire that fails to give satisfactory wear any time **before or after 12 months of use.** Send $1 for each tire or tube. Pay balance C.O.D. 6% off, cash with order. Don't wait! Send today! (Dealers wanted).

VICTORY TIRE CO. 2129 S. Wabash Ave. Dept. 58, CHICAGO, ILL.

Make Your VEST POCKET BRING YOU $400 A MONTH!

Brand New

An article that arouses instant curiosity. Quickly demonstrated and conveniently carried in vest pocket. Protection for everybody against robbers, criminals, morons, vicious dogs, etc. yet it is not classed as a weapon, because absolutely harmless.

"Sold 17 First Day Out"

writes Hansen of Northern Illinois. Hayes of Minn. wires "Sold my first dozen in five hours. Send 3 Doz. C. O. D. at once." Agents make $2.55 on each sale. Big extra profits on quantity. Prospects everywhere—men, women, banks, theatres, merchants, etc. You should close at least 40%.

Looks Like A Fountain Pen

INSTANT TEAR GAS PROTECTION WITHOUT INJURY TO ANYONE

Two Tear Gas Cartridges Free with every gun. You make 20 cents each on every extra cartridge sold.

Exclusive Territory still open. Especially attractive proposition to men controlling force of salesmen. Send Coupon for details regarding How to get Free Demonstrator, etc.

Women are not afraid to use the Atlas Gun. Greatest protection for women ever invented.

500 Atlases recently ordered by banks in one territory alone.

ATLAS TEAR GAS FOUNTAIN PEN GUN

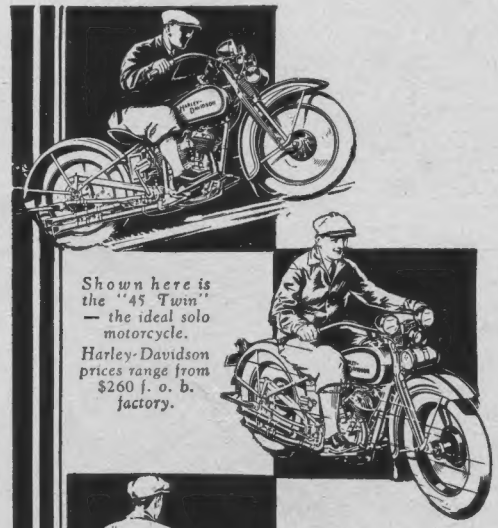
Atlas Tear Gas Co., Chicago, Ill.
Ogden Park Station, Dept. 67

Gentlemen: Please send me particulars regarding your Fountain Pen Tear Gas Gun agency. Also tell me how I can get a Demonstrator and two cartridges Free.

Name.....

Town.....

St. or R. F. D......*State*.....



Shown here is the "45 Twin" — the ideal solo motorcycle. Harley-Davidson prices range from $260 f. o. b. factory.

THE THRILL OF THRILLS

—any way you look at it!

MOTORCYCLING — thrills of a dozen sports in one! A mount that responds instantly to every whim — now streaking down the highway — now zooming over a towering hill — now just purring along a winding lane.

Answer the call of the Open Road with your own Harley-Davidson. What a vacation you'll have *this* year! And the trips, tours, and week-end outings with the jolly Harley-Davidson bunch! Cost is little—for a Harley-Davidson is easy to buy, and upkeep is only a penny or two per mile.

Let your nearest Harley-Davidson Dealer demonstrate. Ask about his Pay-As-You-Ride Plan.

Ride a HARLEY-DAVIDSON

HARLEY-DAVIDSON MOTOR COMPANY
Dept. M. G., Milwaukee, Wis.

Interested in your motorcycles. Send literature.

Name.....

Address.....

My age is ☐ 16-19 years, ☐ 20-30 years, ☐ 31 years and up, ☐ under 16 years. Check your age group.

The cigarette that puts a spark of pleasure in every passing moment.

Camel

© 1930, R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company, Winston-Salem, N. C.